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Battling with their past and fighting for their future: A study of the experiences and identities of a group of British Army students in UK higher education

Abstract

Missing from academic literature exploring the learning experiences of under-represented student populations in UK higher education are accounts from students who have served, or are serving in the British Army. This lacuna is despite suggestions that the specific demands and obligations of military service may engender tensions for personnel when adapting to civilian life. Two purposes frame this investigation: 1.To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students in UK higher education who have served, or are still serving, in the British Army and 2.To investigate how notions of identity affect the higher education experiences of this particular group of students.

I frame the study within a critical emancipatory methodology drawing theoretically on the transformative paradigm that privileges sensitivity to social and cultural histories. Utilising qualitative methods, data sources comprise an internet based survey and nineteen autobiographical narrative interviews conducted by telephone, face-to-face and Skype.

Analysis of data indicates that the experiences of British Army students are profoundly influenced by two main factors: a damaging educational past and the ideals and values they bring with them to higher education. Resilience is shown to reside at the interface of military and academic identities, fostering levels of endurance that significantly contribute to scholarly accomplishment as well as protection from educational practices that marginalise this student population.

In this empirical study I assist in understanding the experiences of students during a time of profound change in higher education, significantly contributing to new epistemologies that describe how social disadvantage is experienced in the 21st century. More critically, this thesis makes a significant and original contribution to scholarship concerned with how qualities of resilience can foster academic flourishing.

**Battling with their past and fighting for their future: A
study of the experiences and identities of a group of
British Army students in UK higher education**

Kim Vivienne Webb

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Anthropology and Education**

Durham University

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Declaration

The material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. It is the sole work of the author.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to my father, Joseph William Priestley, who died before I really knew him, when I was a young teenager – Dad, this is for you, I like to think it would make you smile.

Chapter 1: Reveille

1.1 Introduction

I introduce this thesis with the military musical term reveille that is often played by Armed Forces personnel on the bugle, trumpet or pipe, and marks the rising of the sun preceding a new day's activities. The sunrise of this research begins with a brief overview of the wider background to the study before I narrow the focus to the specific research context. I then outline the research purposes and questions before moving on to describe the nature of this work, explaining the significance of a critical and emancipatory methodology. Finally, I detail the significant and original contribution to knowledge this study makes, concluding with a description of the thesis organisation.

1.2 The study in wider perspective

The broad perspective of this work is interwoven with the rapid social and economic transformations taking place globally, created by the increasingly interconnected nature of the world through international trade and cultural exchange. These changes form the backdrop to this work in three overlapping areas: the changes to higher education institutions, changes to conceptualisations of what is meant by social class and finally, how individuals can adapt to the changes of these social, economic and cultural transformations.

Over the past three decades, changing forms and patterns of employment, the steep decline in manufacturing and the loss of heavy industrialisation have contributed to the rise of the 'knowledge economy', equating economic success with intangible assets that include knowledge, skills and innovative potential.

In response to these turbulent times, higher education institutions have experienced a period of profound change, driven by political, cultural, economic and technological factors affecting all aspects of university provision, including the environment in which they operate, what they are required to deliver and how they are structured and funded. These changes have contributed to an expansion of post compulsory

education, particularly higher education, to meet the demands of a transforming economy.

Political commitments expressed through various international and national policies have sought to expand educational access and participation in higher education by redressing the under-representation of certain social groups (Burke, 2012). Despite the relative success of attempts to increase and diversify student participation by investments in funding, resources and personnel, significant gaps remain between the numbers of higher education students from the most advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds as well as between the educational outcomes of different student groups (OFFA/HEFCE, 2014). Important variations also exist between the participation rates of under-represented student groups and the type of higher education institution in which they participate with under-represented students more likely to attend less prestigious institutions (Thomas, 2005).

Evidence suggests that different student populations experience higher education in diverse ways. Minority students groups regarded to be under-represented according to age, (Baxter and Britton, 2001; Merrill, 2004; Reay, 2002; Waller, 2005) social class (Bufton, 2003; Crozier, 2008; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009, 2010; Reay, David and Ball, 2005; Reay, 2001; Tett, 2000) and disability (Barnes, 2005) for example, are more likely to encounter forms of adversity than those students regarded to be traditional. The reasons for these differences in the experience of higher education are hotly contested, with institutional policies, practices and pedagogy implicitly suggesting that students from under represented backgrounds require different forms and degrees of academic and/or pastoral support. In contradistinction, researchers who cast a critical gaze at higher education claim it is the pervasive middle class culture of higher education that shapes the experiences of under-represented students, and no amount of structural reform would dismantle such a monolithic cultural environment.

Understandings of how social class is known and experienced have changed during the recent times of social, economic and cultural transformation. Traditional social relations organised by influential binary oppositions of 'rich' and 'poor' have been eroded as have many visible markers of social differentiation. Whilst there continues

to be a large number of people in low-paid employment, de-industrialisation, the erosion of apprenticeships as a mode of training and the declining power associated with the trade union movement have combined to 'eviscerate class as a visible social presence' (Savage, 2003:536).

Despite political and theoretical claims that there is now a 'classless society' (Clark and Lipset, 1991; Pakulski and Waters, 1996) empirical evidence suggests that the differentiation between the richest and poorest in Britain is the widest it has been for forty years (Dorling et al., 2007). The new social relations of the 21st century expose how conceptualisations of class are changing not only to include more diverse but marginalised groups of people of, for example, 'chavs', popularised in the British television comedy series, *Little Britain*, aired during 2003-2008 (Lockyer, 2010), but also changes to understanding the way class is experienced by individuals and groups in society.

Sennett and Cobb (1993) claim that experiences of class can result in 'hidden injuries', alluding to the powerful dynamic that exists between how notions of class can be affective by practices and actions, leading to experiences of inequality. Following the transformational changes to the contemporary world, class is often unrecognised yet still pervades people's experiences and practices (Reay, 2005a), shaping feelings of marginalisation and inferiority that manifest in situations of adversity. Within the educational context, social class remains an unresolved and haunting issue, despite scholarship indicating that students in higher education from under-represented groups often feel and encounter alienation that impacts the whole of their educational experience (Bufton, 2003; Merrill, 2004; Reay et al., 2005).

The ways in which people respond to and survive adverse experiences, often succeeding in the face of on-going challenges, is the final piece to the wider context of this work. Terminology and concepts such as uncertainty, risk and sustainability are part of our everyday language but this is far less the case with the terms 'vulnerability' and 'resilience'. So far, the concepts for which both terms stand have been shaped largely by the natural sciences, and often regarded in close association with hazards

and the formulation of particular 'plans' that can be put into place to remediate problems and impediments (Kilper, 2012).

Resilience is the ability of people to positively adjust to and cope with adversity (Rutter, 1999), as well as being the capacity to endure on-going hardship in every conceivable way (Walker, Gleaves and Grey, 2006) and can be viewed as a continuum with vulnerability and resilience at either end (Rutter, 1985). The characteristics of resilience are qualities often associated with the working class (Reay et al., 2009) but taken for granted and read as stoicism. Hardiness and endurance are often assumed to be part of the genetic blue-print of individuals with a working class heritage.

Scheper-Hughes (2008:36) identifies features of human resilience as incorporating sources of personal strength that are exercised in everyday contexts of adversity. Within the context of higher education Walker et al., (2006) suggest resilience is a resource aiding adaptability and endurance that can be harnessed and developed within students. Thus, investigating resilience is particularly germane to studies concerned with retention and why some students leave their courses early, whilst others prevail and complete their studies, despite seemingly insurmountable barriers.

What the above overview of this work illustrates is how this study that examines the experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army is framed within broad, overlapping and contemporary concerns with the changes emerging from and in response to, the rapid social, economic and cultural transformations of the 21st century.

1.3 Context of the study

This thesis is concerned with a question loosely formed four years ago - what happens to British Armed forces personnel when they enrol as students in higher education? In the process of this research, I have reflected upon and re-worded this embryonic question many times, reflecting the fluid and unpredictable nature of social inquiry. Still, the essence of that initial quest remains at the core of this work.

The original question emerged after completing a scoping study in 2009 on behalf of the Anthropology Department and Foundation Programme at Durham University. I

investigated what academic and pastoral support might benefit students from the military, who often commit to a career path before taking advantage of opportunities in further and higher education (Ministry of Defence, 2008:16). Recognising the educational disadvantage that military personnel may experience, all political parties in 2008 supported a pledge to fund complete tuition fees for a first Level 3 qualification or a first Foundational or full degree for eligible Armed Forces personnel, suggesting the possibility of an increasing student population within further and higher education.

Obligations imposed upon the Armed Forces in the course of their duties 'sets them apart from others who serve and protect society' (Brown, 2008:5) and an important element of this 'setting apart' stems from the inculcation of military mores that personnel experience in order to become part of an effective mobilised fighting force. During the year 2013/14 over 22,000 personnel left the Armed Forces with over 15,000 exiting the British Army (Ministry of Defence, 2014). Reasons for leaving are varied and include those who exit before completing training, those who take voluntary or compulsory redundancy and others who may leave at appropriate exit points of for example, pensionable age. Little is known regarding what happens to the majority of personnel when exiting the Armed Forces although there is a body of literature concerned with social exclusion (Higate, 2000; Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011; Iversen et al., 2011). The above issues highlight the importance of understanding the ways in which students from the British Army experience orientation to other aspects of life, including their education, and in this particular context, their experience of higher education.

A further layer to the fabric of this research is that students from the Armed Forces are not recognised as a specific student population; instead military students overlap and merge with scholars identified as under-represented, in contradistinction to traditional students according to age, class, race, gender and disability characteristics. Understanding how disadvantaged students survive and thrive in higher education is salient to widening participation initiatives that seek to increase the diversity of the student population together with research examining retention issues. Of key importance to this current study and providing a final but crucial layer to the fabric of

its basis is the way that everyday 'tactics of resilience' (Scheper-Hughes, 2008:43) underline the ability of some students to withstand and flourish in the face of educational adversity.

During the research process I have made difficult decisions regarding which academic avenues to pursue and which to disregard including which conceptual and methodological boundaries are necessary to ensure that my study focus is not diffuse and unwieldy but is as clear as social research can possibly be. In support of this aim I focus on students from the British Army rather than a combination of the three main Armed Forces for two key reasons. First, the total number of British Army personnel makes up the largest military sector in the UK and second, they overwhelmingly comprise the majority of respondents to this study.

1.4 Research purposes and questions

Drawing upon the disciplines of anthropology and education, this thesis is an interdisciplinary study. I outline below the refined purposes of this research:

- To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students in UK higher education that have served, or are still serving, in the British Army
- To investigate how notions of identity affect the higher education experience of this group of students

Guiding these purposes are the following research questions:

- What are the educational biographies of a group of British Army students who have studied, or are studying in higher education?
- What are the educational experiences of this group of students?
- What military and academic identities do a group of British Army personnel possess and self-perceive when studying in higher education?
- How and to what extent to these identities intersect, collide and coalesce?

Figure 1 that follows is a diagrammatic representation of how the research questions address the study's two major purposes. Next, Figure 2 is an illustration of the whole study, revealing the relationship between research purposes, questions, conceptual content and data collection.

Figure 1 Representation of how the research questions address the study's two major purposes

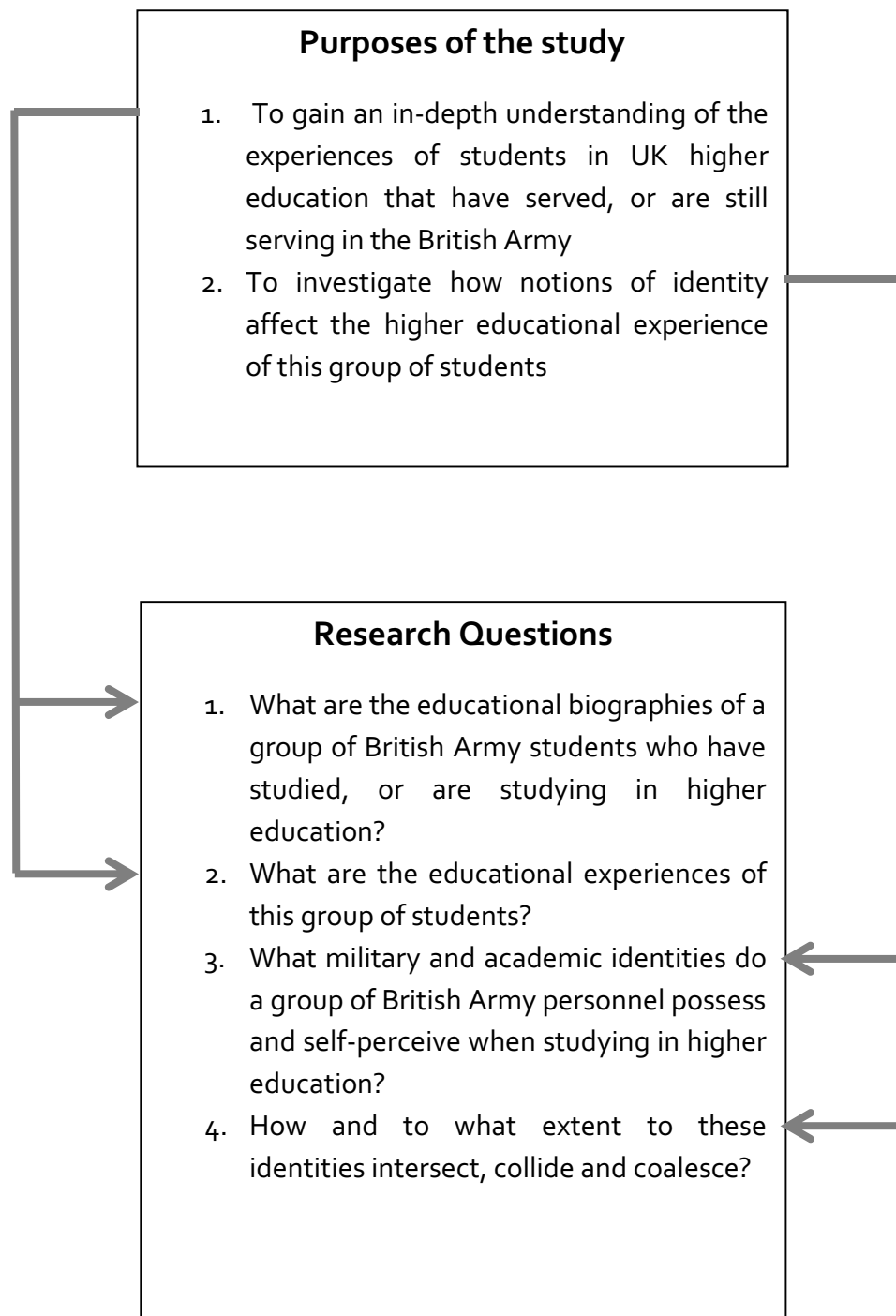
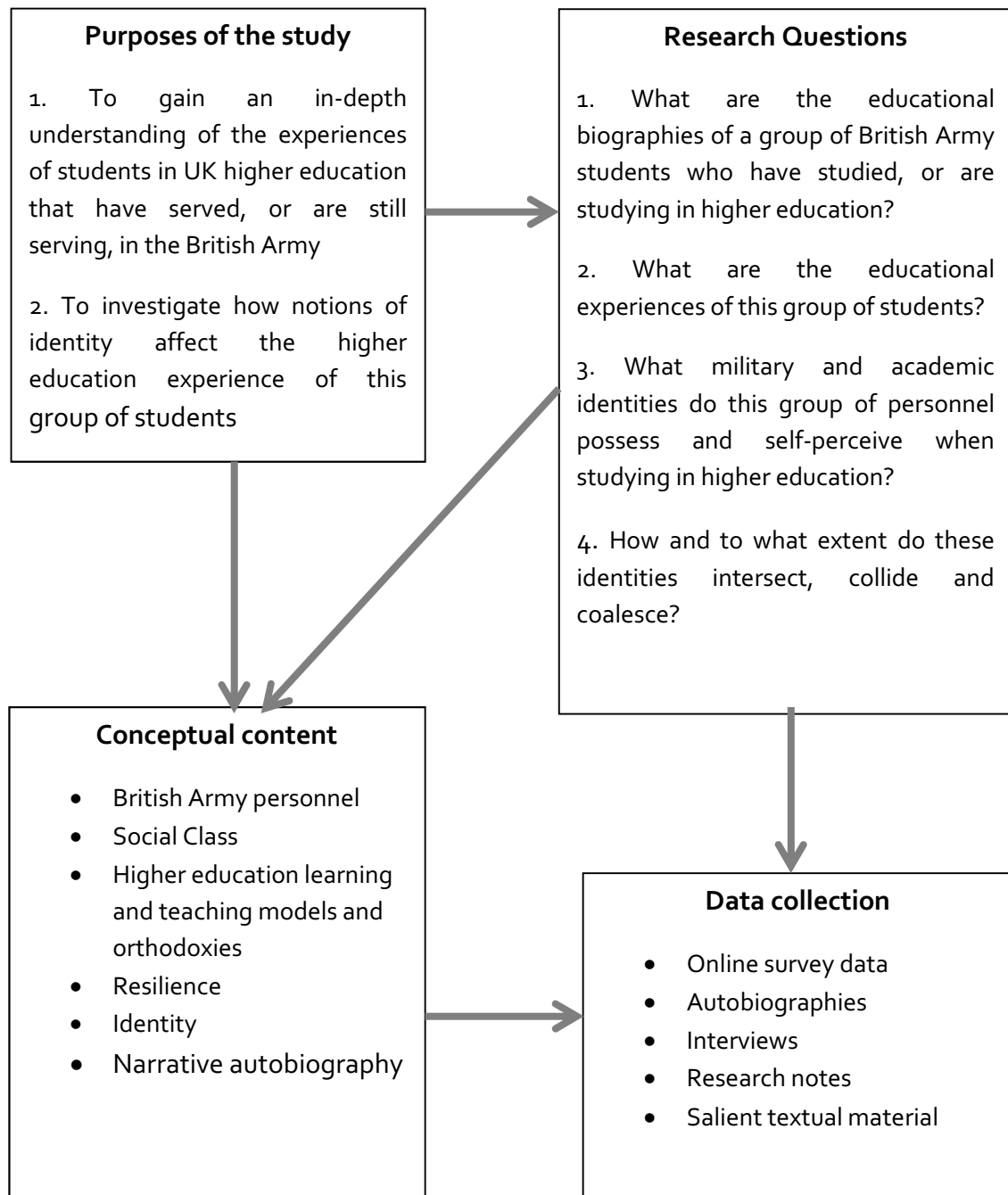


Figure 2 Representation of the whole study

1.5 The nature of this thesis

I frame this study within a critical emancipatory methodology. I draw on the transformative paradigm that privileges sensitivity to social and cultural histories, enabling a holistic and contextual view of the higher education experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army. The transformative

paradigm is particularly appropriate for this research as such an approach foregrounds the social justice philosophy I aspire to by examining the discriminatory and marginalisation practices that many minority populations encounter (Mertens, Bledsoe, Sullivan and Wilson, 2010).

In this research I utilise a mixed method approach incorporating brief demographic data and a substantive qualitative component. Data sources comprise an internet based website, on-line survey, nineteen biographical narrative interviews conducted by telephone, face-to-face and Skype, research field notes and other related and salient material.

1.6 The contribution of this thesis

Importantly, this thesis draws attention to the value of and dynamic qualities of interdisciplinarity. By integrating insights, concepts and techniques from anthropology and education, I develop a unique theoretical and conceptual 'home' for this research, the scope of which transcends a single discipline. The broad and complex categories I examine that comprise social class, the practices, policies and pedagogy of higher education, resilience and identity would be inadequately served by a single academic discipline, resulting in impoverished, thin, research.

In adopting an illuminating autobiographical methodological approach this work contributes to studies concerned with the complex issue of what is meant by social class in the 21st century and how this is lived and experienced by people.

By introducing the concept of resilience as a critical factor to the identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army, my analysis contributes an original theoretical perspective to dominant policies, practices and pedagogy that perpetuate deficit student models. Imaginatively, I demonstrate how epistemology that focuses on the every-day lives of children and adults in the remote shantytowns of North East Brazil is apposite to research concerned with students in UK higher education, contributing to knowledge that examines academic flourishing.

Significantly, this study augments scarce independent socio-political research investigating the institution of the British Army at a time when the military has been required to address a series of social and legal challenges to their unique culture from wider society, including demands to be more representative of the wider population in terms of race, ethnicity, gender orientation as well as disability. My research adds to knowledge regarding what happens to personnel when they exit their military careers, tendering a positive and forward looking approach in contradistinction to studies that espouse social exclusion.

By examining the experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army, I add to the thin shelf of existing UK knowledge concerning military students in higher education. There is a body of work concerned with the higher education experiences of military students in the United States of America (USA), (Livingston, 2009; Rumann and Hamrick, 2009, 2010; Zinger and Cohen, 2010) although this emphasises the social and academic struggles military students encounter, frequently recommending more veteran friendly campuses (Ackerman and Di Ramio, 2009).

Based on the research findings of this current work, I also contribute to knowledge concerned with the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students who have a working class heritage. More broadly still, this thesis adds to what is known regarding under-represented higher education student populations.

By introducing the salience of resilience, I add a significant and original contribution to studies concerned with the hidden yet significant everyday acts of hardiness that people demonstrate in adverse circumstances, adding an important insight into the complex area of how under-represented students experience higher education.

Finally, the findings contribute to research that critically examines how social class is operationalized in higher education institutions by revealing the ways in which students with military backgrounds narrate stories of marginalisation.

1.7 Explaining terminology

In this work, I use many ways of describing the participants who took part, referring to students from the British Army, military personnel, Armed Forces and interviewees to simplify the text and to prevent convolution.

Although the word 'story' is more appropriate to use when speaking in familiar, personal or conversational tones, and 'narrative' may be more distant and formal, I follow Kramp (2004:3) by using the words interchangeably to capture the experiential dimension of 'telling a story'.

To avoid the etymological traps that accompany the terms 'self' and 'individual' (Skeggs, 2011) I draw on the claims of Strathern (1991) who argues that forms of personhood can refer to legal, social and moral states generated through relations with other people. As such, I use the terms soldierhood and studenthood throughout this text.

1.8 Laying the tracks

I organise this thesis into seven chapters. Chapter One introduces the background to this research together with an outline of the purposes and research questions. In Chapter Two I outline the major conceptual and theoretical frameworks focussing firstly on what it is to be a member of the British Army, then move on to social class, higher education learning, teaching and orthodoxies, resilience, identities and narrative autobiography. I describe my qualitative methodological approach in Chapter Three, Design and Methodology, justifying my choice of narrative autobiography and why I draw on the transformative paradigm aligned with mixed method inquiry. Included is a reflective account of my own place within this research.

Chapter Four, Narratives of Sanctuary and Salvation, takes the form of six participants' detailed narrative accounts describing their educational biographies and experiences of higher education, to which I add commentary. Chapter Five, Narratives of Resilience and Achievement, is thematic, describing the military and academic identities that participants possess and how these intersect, collide and coalesce when in higher education.

In Chapter Six I draw together the interwoven and overlapping threads and strands of this work to discuss the experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army in light of the complexities I identify. Chapter Seven is a succinct overview of the whole thesis, explaining the rationale, purposes and aims that underpin this work and why my methodological approach is narrative autobiography. I summarise the key findings, how these relate to my conceptual framework and the ways in which these make an important contribution to existing scholarship before closing with my final remarks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Marking out the territory

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide the conceptual framework for my research exploring the experiences and identity constructions of higher education students who have served, or are serving in the British Army. Evident from my review is the apparent lack of UK literature regarding this area, and therefore this appraisal is necessarily bold in its sweep, drawing on a range of diverse, yet importantly interconnected sources.

As this study is primarily concerned with the experiences of higher education students from the British Army, I explore what it may be like to be a soldier in the British Army. I draw on literature from the United States of America (USA) to examine what is known regarding the experiences of military personnel in higher education.

Following this introduction, I investigate what is meant by the term social class and how this experience manifests for students in higher education from the working class, paying particular attention to institutional practices and policies in addition to pedagogical influences.

To provide situational context to the research I present an overview of the major structural, social and pedagogical changes to higher education, beginning with its expansion of the 1960s that sought to prepare an economically advanced workforce, a critically and liberally educated population and a diversification of the demography of the student population. In this exposition, I draw on literature concerned with under-represented students, particularly those from disadvantaged social classes.

Moving on, I introduce and examine literature concerning the concept of resilience as a student resource to be harnessed and shaped in higher education that can mitigate the adverse circumstances that many under-represented students encounter, contributing to student accomplishment.

I investigate theoretically what is meant by the term identity and finally explore how employing narrative autobiography can help capture what is otherwise an elusive and slippery concept.

Overwhelmingly, my research reveals a dearth of literature pertaining to military personnel in UK higher education and this has been both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the scarcity of literature confirms the uniqueness of this research and the contribution that my findings will make to knowledge. On the other hand, such a lack of research has required that I make decisions regarding how and where to situate concepts relating to military personnel within wider academic contexts and this has not been an easy task. However, I hope these omissions expose the array of knowledge that is missing relative to military personnel at higher education and can be viewed as potential avenues for future study.

2.2 The British Army, soldiers and soldiering: A very unquiet front

Officially, the British Armed Forces are referred to as Her Majesty's Armed Forces and comprise three professional uniformed services: the Naval Service, which includes the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, the Royal Air Force and the British Army. The British Army title does not incorporate the term Royal as many Regiments and Corps include the prefix Royal and there are Royal family members occupying senior positions within many Regiments. The full time element of the British Army is referred to as the regular army following the creation of the volunteer reservist territorial force in 1908, now known as the Army Reserve. As at October 2013, the full time trained strength of the British Armed Forces amounted to a total of 160,710 personnel comprising 35,350 from the Royal Air Force, 31,420 from the Royal Navy and 93, 940 from the British Army (Ministry of Defence, 2013).

Despite a lack of precise demographic detail regarding military recruitment, the National Audit Office report, *Leaving the Services* (Ministry of Defence, 2007:9) states that the army in particular draws a very large number of recruits from educationally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds compared to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Whilst the Ministry of Defence does not collect specific data on the socio-economic background of recruits, in 2008-09, only 8.9% of new soldier recruits recorded grades for English GCSE passed at Grade A*- C, compared with a national average of 61% (53% for boys and 69% for girls) in England in the same year (quoted in Gee, 2007). The Armed Forces draw non-officer recruits mainly from young people living in disadvantaged communities (Gee, 2007) implicitly suggesting that a number

of military personnel are disproportionately from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Indeed, the Army's only attainment target for new infantry recruits is Level 1 in Functional Skills before completing training, below the GCSE A* - C Standard recommended by the Department for Education as 'critical' for young people seeking work (Child Soldiers International, 2012). Britain is the only European country to recruit into the regular army at age 16 (Ware, 2012).

Available demographic profiles of military personnel indicate recent influences of multi-cultural politics; during 2010, 7,895 personnel serving with the British Army included servicemen and women from N. Ireland, Nepal, Fiji, Ghana, South Africa, Bangladesh, New Zealand, and Canada (Ware, 2012). Recent research exploring the role of Commonwealth soldiers in the Armed Forces suggests three influences explain the emergence of a more culturally diverse British army recruitment pool; an assertive recruitment drive in the 1990s as a result of dwindling numbers; a relaxing of the rules on the national identity of potential recruits; and a growing national emphasis on individual human rights prohibiting forms of discrimination in the workplace (Ware, 2012).

Military personnel are required to have the training and skills necessary for promotion and can also apply through various schemes for personal educational development. Indeed, the UK military, as with many other countries, operates an 'Up or Out' policy on promotion, that necessitates personnel actively pursuing opportunities for professional and personal development. In terms of the commissioned ranks, there are 18 UK University Officer Training Corps (UOTC), each of which serves the universities in a specific geographical area that develop potential leadership of selected university students. The Royal Military Academy (RMA) was established by King George II in 1741, initially in London at Woolwich with the purpose of producing officers for the Artillery Corps and Engineers. In 1947 the Royal Military Academy moved to Sandhurst (RMAS) in Surrey; more than 80% of Officer Cadets are university graduates although others are serving soldiers who have been selected for officer training and some are from overseas, having been chosen by their own armies to complete their training at the academy (Ware, 2012).

In common with all professional armies, the British Army is a disciplined force (Kirke, 2010). Recruits undertaking basic training encounter socialisation and stylised repetition of ritualistic practices that take place within sharp, strict hierarchies of power and subordination, (Hockey, 1986) creating obedient, conforming military personnel, thus shaping an effective, reliable, cogent army (Kirke, 2010). The clear visibility of the hierarchical structure by uniform represents key elements of discipline and authority, ensuring that personnel are aware of their place within the stratified hierarchy and what is dutifully expected of them.

Rigorous inculcation develops the acquisition and development of physical and mental attributes necessary so that personnel may undertake the tasks required for warfare. During this time, recruits are shaped according to a strict prototype concerned with appearance, behaviour and attitude (Woodward, 2000) as the need to impose the elements of a 'soldierly spirit' is equally important to learning mechanical skills (French, 2005:64). Jolly (1996:36) notes that recruits 'surrender control over virtually every aspect of their lives to those in authority over them' culminating in the passing-out parade marking the transformation from civilian to soldier, which is described as 'ceremonial rebirth' (1996:37).

Rigid training and attestation to the Oath of Allegiance whereby personnel pledge Sovereign loyalty, create a broadly cohesive British Army, implicitly suggesting a monolithic sense of what it is to be a soldier, crucial to the maintenance of an effective fighting force. As Hockey (1986:142) notes, 'through initial organisational socialisation and life in a tightly-knit occupational community, a particular self-image is internalised'. This has a profound salience in military terms in that the tangible essence of soldierhood remains long after injury and it is this particular narrative that has received great scrutiny over the last decade with the increasing awareness of the damaging effects of military combat on both the physical and mental spheres.

2.3 Exiting the British Army

During 2011 – 2012, approximately 22,000 men and women left the Armed Forces and entered civilian life; some may have served a full career whilst others may not have completed their basic training. Preparation for leaving the Armed Forces is

undertaken by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) established in 1998 delivering resettlement services to all British Armed Forces. Those who have served less than four years or compulsorily discharged are provided with a resettlement brief that signposts assistance available from ex-service welfare organisations and offers information regarding housing.

Government support aimed at improving welfare issues for veteran and serving military personnel has been reinforced by the enshrinement in the Armed Forces Act 2011 of the Military Covenant, a social contract based on reciprocal relations of obligations and expectations within government, society and the military. The Military Covenant recognises the sacrifices made by serving personnel, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged as serving members of the Armed Forces. In essence, the Armed Forces Act acknowledges that military personnel are a distinct population, entitled to privileged access to health, housing and education for forces children.

Whilst most military leavers adapt well to civilian life (Iversen et al., 2005) a minority experience social exclusion issues relating to substance abuse, homelessness, financial difficulties and criminal offending. Research suggests that *serving* UK personnel report more instances of depression, anxiety and alcohol dependency (Iversen et al., 2009) than they do Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and that personnel at most risk of PTSD are deployed Reservists (Harvey et al., 2012) together with those who leave the military before completing four years of service (Buckman et al., 2012). Yet, there is a public perception that PTSD is more prevalent and debilitating (Wessely, 2005). Studies examining the reticence of personnel to seek mental health care (Iversen et al., 2011:5) note that stigma is an important deterrent to gaining support, arguing that 'such deterrents are amplified in military culture where characteristics of strength, resilience and self-sufficiency are selected and prized'.

Exiting the British Army at the end of a career is often associated with loss – of role, identity, friendships and purpose that can lead to a sense of abandonment (Ormerod, 2009). Whilst many veterans settle well into civilian life, Jolly (1996:2) suggests that others, who are unable to break ties with their past military career remain forever

'square pegs, uncomfortable as civilians, always ex-servicemen'. Similarly, McDermott (2007:239) observes 'it is clear that full disengagement from military society is only ever partially achieved'. In an exploration of military identities as articulated by serving and former British Armed Forces personnel, Woodward and Jenkins (2011:262) note that military identities 'do not disappear on discharge', indicating that British Army personnel entering higher education may find the transition to that of studenthood un-straightforward and problematic.

2.4 Challenging conceptions of soldierhood

The ways in which UK military personnel are represented in discourse is significant as a loss of public support may lead to a reduction in public respect for the Armed Forces themselves and subsequently in recruitment figures. This can affect the morale and operational effectiveness of deployed troops, whilst simultaneously creating pressure on government to reduce defence expenditure. A further potential consequence of public indifference or hostility towards the military is that service personnel might face an inhospitable environment for their reintegration into civilian society following discharge (Gribble, Wessely and Klein, 2012).

Soldierhood as a single and fixed narrative is represented by popular media discourse of film, television and song (Kearney, 2003:50). British Army personnel have been variously portrayed through a vast range of populist representations that include the war poetry of Siegfried Sassoon (*Prelude: The Troops*) and Wilfred Owen (*Anthem for Doomed Youth*), the folk music of June Tabor (*No Man's Land/Flowers of the Forest*) as well as fictional and non-fictional literature from authors including Pat Barker, *The Regeneration Trilogy* (2008) and Patrick Hennessey, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* (2009). Films of war stretch back to *The Battle of the Somme* and *Dunkirk*, to more contemporary understandings of warfare that include *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker*. Recent television productions include the BBC1 drama *Our Girl*, depicting the story of a struggling young female Londoner who enlists with the Royal Army Medical Corps, hinting at an awareness of the increasing diversity of British Army personnel.

King (2010) identifies a change in contemporary understandings of soldierhood, observing that those now killed in combat are no longer primarily identified as serving members of the Armed Forces, but are nationally named and personalised as fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters, over-turning ideas of an essentialist meaning as to what it is to be a soldier and emphasising the multiple nature of narratives concerned with British Army personnel.

The above literature contributes to Woodward, Winter and Jenkins' (2007:29) claim that in British print media, the 21st century soldier is an 'uneasy figure' enmeshed in contemporary anxieties relating to the concerns of (non)justified warfare actions. McGarry and Walklate (2011) add to this debate by arguing contemporary soldierhood constructions situate personnel paradoxically within criminal *and* victim perspectives, claiming that a range of acts can be committed in the course of 'duty' including forms of abuse, torture and human rights offences.

Indeed, media coverage in the UK detailing the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan has raised public notions of military abuse and criminality with the death of prisoner Baha Mousa whilst in British custody in Basra, Iraq in 2003 and victimhood in the trial of Sergeant Alexander Blackman, a Royal Marine convicted of murdering a wounded Taliban insurgent in Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2011 (Morris and Norton-Taylor 2013). In the aftermath of the publicised trial that found Blackman being jailed for ten years and dismissed from the military with disgrace, a groundswell of public support emerged effectively changing the 'accused' to 'victim'.

The implication of these developments is significant to my work exploring the higher education experiences and identity constructions of students from the British Army as it is clear the traditional quest for homogeneity and uniformity in the military is no longer appropriate or tenable. Conceptions of contemporary soldierhood need to tolerate and recognise the co-existence of other identities, yet it is clear there are multiple difficulties in understanding how identity is stable, yet responsive, an essence, yet open to reinvention, a fixed singular point, yet vulnerable and shifting.

2.5 Military personnel in higher education

Nearly 70 years ago Major S H Kraines (1945:290), noted that 'the veteran who goes to college will present many problems quite different from those of the usual college student'. This view remains broadly supported today by the majority of academic literature originating from the USA emphasising the barriers military personnel experience when becoming students in higher education. Such studies should be interpreted with a degree of caution. Significant differences exist between the sizes of the different militaries and the way in which military education is funded in the USA by benefits granted under the revised Servicemen's Readjustment Act 1944 known informally as the G.I. Bill.

The majority of research from the USA (Di Ramio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008; Livingston 2009; Rumann and Hamrick 2009; Zinger and Cohen 2010) focuses on military personnel who are re-enrolling as students following deployment. Di Ramio, Ackerman and Mitchell (2008:80) investigate the issues affecting military students who have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, finding a range of social barriers that include 'connecting with peers and blending in' and identify implications for student support services. Livingston's (2009) research identifies and separates social and academic experiences that student veterans encounter whilst Rumann and Hamrick (2009; 2010) suggest that educational institutions should foster receptive and supportive environments to aid the needs of re-enrolling military personnel. Zinger and Cohen's (2010) study of challenges encountered by returning student veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts invoke the need for educators, mental health professionals and administrators to be better informed with regard to policy making and programme development.

Stalides (2008:10), who investigates US veterans' transition to education, claims that after leaving the Armed Forces, ex-military personnel experience both the loss of employment, and the loss of a culture that 'consists of a separate history, worldviews, laws, norms, discourse conventions and even language'. The findings of two student veteran focus groups undertaken by Glasser, Powers and Zywiak (2009), reveal American participants encounter a sense of culture shock whilst at college, expressing surprise at their fellow classmate's immaturity, lack of attention and inappropriate

questions regarding combat. Veteran students were also concerned by the political views expressed by lecturers and suggested recommendations that would ease their adjustment to education, including veteran mentors and the formation of student veteran clubs.

What the above studies illustrate is that most research constructs military personnel within deficient student models who face 'barriers' (Livingston, 2009) have 'needs' (Murphy, 2011) or are 'at risk' (Wheeler, 2012), suggesting individual disadvantage or perceived shortcomings.

Yet, paradoxically, it is the opposite qualities that military personnel are perceived to possess in relation to fostering and developing those qualities in others: they are certainly recognised as great strengths and valuable attributes by UK (and USA) government initiatives seeking their skills in teacher training initiatives that include *Troops to Teachers*, *Soldiers4Schools*, and *Skillforce*. Within these schemes, ex-soldiers are actively sought as important and useful teachers within the education system. Since the publication of *The Nation's Commitment; Cross Government Support for our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans* (Ministry of Defence, 2008), eligible ex-British Army personnel are entitled to free tuition towards a first university degree or a Level 3 college qualification at the end of their military careers, indicating the potential of a growing student population in higher education. These inducements encouraging military personnel back to education following military service appear to value and validate the resources students from the British Army may bring to higher education institutions, whilst remaining an unidentified and ignored UK student population.

Missing from studies investigating the experiences of students that have served in the military is a socio-cultural account exploring the influences that military personnel bring with them to higher education. There is also a lacuna of work that eschews student pathology and emphasises the qualities and strengths that military personnel bring with them to higher education that assist academic flourishing. Little research exists that examines the policies, practices and ethos of higher education institutions

that create the conditions under which military students remain undetected and hidden from view.

3. The (in)visibility of social class

Theoretically, a universal definition of what is meant by social class is highly elusive. New technical sophistication has steered the development of the new National Statistics Socio-Economic (NS-SEC) classification scheme that merges two previous socio-economic classificatory systems, Social Class based on Occupation and Socio-Economic Groups. Developed from the Goldthorpe (1996) schema based on occupations, the NS-SEC now identifies eight occupational categories in a circumscribed approach unconcerned with deeper meanings that explore how class is experienced.

Some theorists argue that class has become a redundant issue, replaced with the individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991) that people now exercise as they make increasing choices over the way in which they live as a result of changes to the employment market. Advocates of theories of individualism argue that values and characteristics formerly based on elementary solidarities of family, work and place that previously fostered notions of class have disappeared; similarly globalisation and the growth of postmodern culture have eroded ideas of traditionalism (Crompton, 2008).

I reject analyses that suggest class can be easily categorised or is declining in importance, and I offer a more subtle and nuanced socio-cultural interpretation. Conceptually, I regard class theories as abstractions that fail to capture lived, fluid experiences. I believe that understandings of class cannot be analysed by stagnant statistics that obscure emotional feelings of powerlessness, concealing the significance of inequality (Charlesworth, 2000). Sennett and Cobb (1993) and (Bourdieu, 1999) allude to a sensitive understanding of class as being something that can be 'injured' and wreaks 'suffering' whilst feminist writer hooks, (2000) claims that 'class matters' because it affects individuals' experiences and practices, including the way in which people are valued ultimately affecting one's life chances and sense of worth.

In this study, I follow the perspective of Kuhn (1995) whose narrative *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* articulates what it is to be a working class girl who, after passing the grammar school entrance exam at age 11, finds herself in an alien and hostile landscape where her background is a source of shame. Kuhn (1995:98), poignantly describes class as something 'that breathes beneath clothes and under skin; that endures in reflexes, in the psyche, at the very core of being'. Such an affective, psychic approach (Reay, 2005b) to understanding class is, I believe, necessary to tease out and expose the hidden, complex and subtle ways in which class intersects with the experiences of British Army students in higher education.

3.1 Class and habitus

Literature indicates that students in higher education from the working class bring values and beliefs with them that culminate in experiences that describe an 'alien environment' (Askham, 2008:94). The concept of habitus provides an analytical tool for understanding individuals as a complex combination of their past and present and is often explored in research that examines the experiences of non-traditional students.

The term habitus emerged during the 1930s in the work of Mauss (1967), later being refined and re-introduced by the French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu in *An Outline of Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu 1977:13). The Latin word 'habitus' refers to a habit or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body (Jenkins 1992:74). Bourdieu (1993:47) describes the habitus as 'the social conditions of the production of agents and the durable effects that they exercise by inscribing themselves in disposition', demonstrating the way that the social world is embodied in individuals rather than being composed of mental attitudes and perceptions. Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1990:70) is manifest via durable ways of 'standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking', indicating the way in which habitus is internalised and operationalized.

By exploring the concept of habitus, an examination can be made as to how experiences of the past influence and affect experiences of the present, offering an explanation as to why working class students from the British Army display attitudes

of ambivalence to orthodox higher education practices and policies. Although the habitus is manifest in an individual context, Bourdieu (1977) claims that shared experiences of the social world will develop a collective mutual habitus. Therefore, individuals sharing the same influences will tend to have similar experiences and dispositions, as Bourdieu (1977:85) notes, 'the system of dispositions common to all products of the same structures'.

Critiques of habitus include challenges of determinism whereby individual agency is obscure, whilst supporters of the concept claim Bourdieu's rationale for developing habitus was in an attempt to transcend the positivistic dualisms of agency/structure, objective/subjective and the macro/micro (Reay, 2004b). Field and Morgan-Klein (2010) argue that Bourdieu's 1960s Paris fieldwork was undertaken at a particular educational zeitgeist and that conceptually habitus is now an inappropriate approach for research relating to the expanded higher education institutions of the 21st century.

Despite the above criticisms, the concept of habitus is widely used (Archer, Hutchings and Ross 2003; Bowl 2001, 2003; Bufton 2003; Crozier et al., 2008; Reay 2004) to explain the sense of unease experienced when non-traditional students attend and study in higher education institutions. In this sense, habitus is most often framed as a constraining concept, pulling individuals to their familial environments and early socialisation practices. However, habitus is not always concerned with restriction and exclusion.

Baker and Brown (2008:58) extend the concept of habitus to being an 'aspirational' force in explaining how rural, disadvantaged participants from Wales successfully enter and navigate their way through university. The study highlights how aspects of Welsh culture, involving a rich blend of images and symbolic resources favoured the acquisition of personal resources that combine to facilitate a sense of entitlement to being a higher education student. Within Baker and Brown's (2008) framework of habitus, attention is given to the contextual influence of history, culture and national identity in constructing positive, flourishing orientations to education.

3.2 Social class and higher education: Making the familiar strange

The academic literature on the lives and experiences of academics from the working class consistently describe visceral feelings of ambivalence and disadvantage (Charlesworth, 2000; Dews and Law, 1995; Reay, 2013; Skeggs, 2004). Describing conflict and frustration, these authors indicate a divisive middle-class bias in their higher educational institutions that was hitherto unknown and unexpected before their experiences. These moving personal stories shine light on the fissure that exists between a working class upbringing and the privileged ethos of the university institution. Importantly, such studies reveal the pervading effects of social class 'marked by signs easily concealed' (Dews and Law 1995:6), revealing the problematic nature of claiming a working class identity in a situational context that presumes middle class homogeneity.

Narratives of working class men and women as students in UK higher educational institutions are suffused with experiences of alienation and the complexity they encounter in striving for academic achievement that appears as dissonance with their familial background. Literature in this area emanates from a range of authors (Baxter and Britton 2001; Bowl 2001, 2003; Christie 2007; Christie et al., 2008; Christie, Munro, and Wager 2005; Crossan et al., 2003; Tett 2000; Weil 1986) who are primarily concerned with examining the experiences of alienation and ambivalence students from the working class experience when learning in higher education.

A significant corpus concerned with the experiences of higher education students from the working class stems from educational sociologist Diane Reay (Reay et al., 2009, 2010; Reay, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2006). The majority of this work explores the contradictions that working class students encounter in terms of their classed background and aspirations to participate and flourish in higher education.

Despite the prolific authorship as detailed above, academic work examining the experiences of higher education students from the working class often neglect the differences that occur within and across student populations, and obscure the way in which student experiences are situated within wider contexts of educational policy, practices and pedagogy. By removing the student experience from these wider

frames of reference, the student experience that is conveyed appears to mirror the static vision of studenthood that most authors are keen to distance themselves from.

Conventional assumptions that under-represented students are deemed to be 'lacking' in cognitive ability to face challenges from those who argue that traditional pedagogical practices are failing to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Framing his argument in a socio-cultural context that views knowledge as a process constituted between members of overlapping discourse communities, Northedge (2003) suggests educational programmes should be designed that support and encourage more levels of student participation in order that studenthood can develop and flourish. Such a programme would include facilitating sustained community dialogues in which students feel comfortable to take part, rather than being exposed in a single, continuous authoritative pedagogic approach. Similarly, Foster, Lewis and Onafowora (2003) who examine the learning trajectories of students of colour, note that such students are often viewed negatively along a continuum of inferiority. Arguing from an anthropological perspective referred to as cultural congruence, conflict and discontinuity, Foster et al., (2003:263) claim that cultural diversity is a resource that should be utilised in the teaching and learning process, in place of the ethnocentrism that permeates many teaching practices and influences. Whilst most research concerned with the influence of culture has emphasised literary development, other studies have applied cultural knowledge to mathematics and science teaching (Treisman, 1985).

In this research, I have chosen to move away from student models of deficiency and suggest instead that what is interesting about these studies is how, by focusing restrictively on barriers and obstacles, they fail to investigate how and in what ways students from under-represented groups in higher education persist and endure to overcome the adversity that they encounter.

4. Higher education: On the front line

To provide contextual depth to this current study, I provide a brief examination of UK higher education, taking as my starting point the 1960s as a time of expansion in response to the demands of an increasing population and a growing technological

economy. The growth of higher education became significant with the publication of the Robbins Report (1963) examining the way in which potential demand for higher education was emerging in terms of qualifications and socio-economic background, estimating an almost 10% rise in the percentage of the age group receiving full time higher education by 1980. The Robbins Report identified four key functions of higher education as:

- Creating skills for employment
- Promoting the powers of the mind
- Advancement of learning and search for truth
- Transmitting a common culture and common standards of citizenship

A second sector of higher education was created in 1965 as a result of the perceived dichotomy between academic and vocational education, encompassing leading colleges of further education and new polytechnics, funded and managed by local authorities. In 1991 the White Paper, *Higher Education: A New Framework* (Department for Education, 1991) proposed abolishing the binary divide between the two sectors, awarding polytechnics university status in 1992 creating flexibility for the sector to respond to rising student demand and establishing new funding councils (Burke, 2012).

Two influential reports published during 1997 are crucial to understanding recent expansion and change within higher education that encompasses widening participation, a highly contested concept in terms of deliverance, lacking an agreed definition. The first of these, *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* (Further Education Funding Council, 1997) known as the Kennedy Report aimed to advise on the identification of under-represented groups in the sector following structural issues experienced by further education as a consequence of 'marketization' rendering it 'uneconomic' (1997:3) for colleges to support the needs of non-traditional students. The Kennedy Report suggested how financial arrangements might be introduced to facilitate wider participation in further and higher education. Although the report noted increased participation had achieved some success, this occurred 'mainly in providing opportunities for those who have already achieved to continue to do so'. The Kennedy Report concluded that marketization led to the

exclusion of many potential applicants to university, particularly from lower socio-economic groups.

The second influential document, *The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education* (Dearing, 1997) recommended phasing out local authority means-tested maintenance grants to financially disadvantaged students and recommended institutional costs should be partially borne by students. This became manifest in subsidised loans available to all students regardless of socio-economic background, the majority of whom came from financially advantageous families (Blanden and Machin, 2004). Simultaneously the Dearing Report identified university under-representation from those of 'low socio-economic groups, people with disabilities and specific ethnic minority groups' (Dearing, 1997:14).

Various drivers of expansion in the higher education sector have undoubtedly led to a greater number of students accessing learning but what the literature reveals is that there is not greater diversity among the student population (Thomas, 2005). A growing body of literature (Burke, 2012; McGivney, 2001; Thomas, 2005) critiques the policies and practices of widening participation, questioning whether such drivers of change have altered the status quo for those students traditionally excluded. McGivney (2001) argues that in the discourse of widening participation, non-participation is viewed largely as a social problem, with individuals described negatively as having poor basic skills that result in a form of exclusion from mainstream society. The implication is that widening participation is a form of social control or process intended to change the behaviour and the subsequent prospects of the socially excluded. Thomas (2005:194), notes that 'lip service' is often paid to the notion of widening participation and claims that notwithstanding the metaphorical barriers that students from under-represented groups encounter, such as financial anxieties, it is the embedded ethos of higher education institutions that lay at the heart of widening participation debates.

4.1 Higher education: Critique and vision

A review of the literature indicates imbalances of power and domination that exist in higher education, concerned with institutional and pedagogic dimensions. Delpit

(1988:282) argues that a 'culture of power' exists in the educational environment and analyses five complex rules that explicitly and implicitly affect the educational needs of Black and poor students as:

- Issues of power are enacted in classrooms
- There are rules for the participation in power
- The rules of the culture of power reflect the rules of the culture who have power
- Being told explicitly the rules of power makes acquiring power easier
- Those with the power are frequently least aware of its existence

The dilemma of the 'culture of power' for Delpit (1988) is in communication across cultures and argues for enabling greater contributions to the educational process by those whose voices are currently muted by dominant orthodoxy.

A further critique of higher education is made by Brady (2012) who argues that universities are suffering a sense of moral loss attributable to the erosion of traditional academic values and autonomy as a result of the emergence of neo-liberalism and a move towards managerial forms of university governance. A significant consequence of neo-liberalism on higher education institutions is the relocation of power from the academy to the marketplace and the way in which higher education has evolved into an integral part of the wider socio-economic system. Higher education has been transformed from a site of open inquiry to that of a servant of the 'knowledge economy' concerned with knowledge relating to employment skills, and students reconstituted as 'customers' (Brady, 2012). Symptomatic of the increasing significance of the consumer ethos at higher education is the growing importance and visibility of the annual National Student Survey introduced in 2005 that exposes the world of the university student to scrutiny and debate.

In recent years, the way in which a student experiences their university has turned into a crucial instrument for auditing the quality of institutions of higher education. The National Student Survey measures levels of student satisfaction and is an exercise that holds universities to account for the experience they provide to their students, and impacts upon how institutions are presented to the public. The advent of the

National Student Survey enables comparisons to be made of student satisfaction levels and managers at higher education institutions have become concerned to avoid student disaffection (Furedi, 2009). Universities are now under competitive pressure to provide an increasingly better service or quality of institution to enhance the experience of students so that they may flourish in their studies. Currently the higher education experiences of students from the British Army appear unimportant and unwanted. It is impossible to know if they are being 'served' adequately or indeed at all by higher education institutions that place importance on the National Student Survey yet turn a blind eye to understanding an under-represented group which, the evidence suggests, may experience hidden adversity in civilian contexts.

What the literature above indicates is what Barnett (2000a, 2000b) calls the 'supercomplexity' character of the modern world that is arguably delegitimising the original function of higher education institutions. The institutional autonomy that has privileged higher education institutions in the pursuit of knowledge and truth has been shaken, resulting in fuzzy categories of what is meant by knowledge and the criteria by which we judge it. Barnett (2000b:420) argues for an epistemology for uncertainty, suggesting that universities can reclaim the idea of university knowledge provided that traditional bounded ideas are abandoned and new perspectives of truth and knowledge are explored.

The new vision for higher education espoused by Barnett (2000a, 2000b) is also reflected in new teaching and learning paradigms that question traditional pedagogical practices. Eschewing a competencies approach to learning that provides students with appropriate skills for employment and contribution to the economy, Walker (2006:164) proposes a relational pedagogy for higher education building on Nussbaum's work on capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000). Such a perspective goes beyond being taught what is useful and functional in preparing students for employment, and foregrounds cultural values of human development, agency, well-being and freedom, contributing to human flourishing and developing a more democratic society. Philosophically, in the capability approach, the key concept promotes freedom – a freedom that affords students to choose by motivation and reflective practice the

type of life they want to lead, rather than being equipped with set skills for specific employment functions.

4.2 Under-represented students in higher education

Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003:261) argue that even before new higher education students begin their academic studies, they will have commenced the trajectory of confronting and negotiating the covert 'rules of the game' associated with university life. Prevailing discourses of knowledge, communication and practice may differ internationally, between institutions and disciplines, yet nevertheless these discourses develop and shape an academic ethos that influences the practices and beliefs of students and tutors.

Students that have served, or are serving in the British Army tend to reflect and embody many of the characteristics of non-traditional students (Cook and Young, 2009). These features include being older, married, possibly parents themselves, and being employed whilst studying. Changes to the demography of the university student population have challenged dominant socio-cultural narratives of what it is to be a student, yet constructions of the normative, one-dimensional student persist (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003) as being a young (white) male from an upper-class or middle class background. The perception that studenthood is a single, fixed and stable narrative perpetuates the illusion that students' experiences and opportunities are unfettered by previous learning encounters, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, or age and overlooks the importance of pedagogical and peer relationships that are significant to academic flourishing. Furthermore, a monolithic model disregards the fact that studenthood will differ according to the type of higher education institution that a student attends (Sabri, 2011).

Despite an increase in the numbers of students from under-represented backgrounds attending university in the last decade, academic orthodoxy reflects the dominant narrative of the student learner as middle class (Read et al., 2003). Unpicking what is meant by middle class is slippery, but Ball (2003) suggests that finance is constitutive of the meaning and practices that open up possibilities of educational choice; private schooling, tutoring and cramming, early start experiences and private child care.

Educationally, middle class is operationalized by a range of practices that contribute towards an investment in offspring that ultimately manifests as 'naturalising' higher education as an obvious future, creating disadvantage for other student populations.

It is important to point out that under-represented students are not a homogeneous student population and that differences occur across and within student clusters that include social class, adult learners, students with disabilities, those who may have been in local authority care and students responsible for dependent children. What is significant is that under-represented students comprise a minority in a higher education system that privileges the dominant majority.

A significant body of work examines the experiences under-represented students encounter whilst learning in higher education. This can be broadly categorised as relating to gender (Brine and Waller, 2004; Britton and Baxter, 1999; Tett, 2000; Waller, 2005) and social class (Askham, 2008; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Bowl, 2001; Christie et al., 2005, 2008; Crossan et al., 2003; Merrill, 2007; Reay, 2001, 2002; Tett, 2000; Waller, 2005; Weil, 1986). Overwhelmingly the literature describes how higher education is experienced by under-represented students as a form of 'assault' (Weil 1986:226), or is a source of 'discomfort and feelings of inadequacy' (Reay 2001:340).

That under-represented students are marginalised by higher education orthodoxy is demonstrated by studies that examine student conceptions of belonging and isolation (Read et al., 2003). Hoskins (2012) argues that higher education institutions implicitly encourage certain students to particular types of university, perpetuating a form of inequality at both institutional and student levels. A hierarchical two-tier system of higher education is maintained by under-represented students typically attending post 1992 universities that operationalize access and widening participation policies, proffering the availability of popular courses in newer subjects (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). The traditional, elite, research intensive pre-1992 higher education sector is more resistant to students with non-standard entry qualifications, concomitantly attracting the more 'traditional' students (Hoskins, 2012).

5. Resilience: An aptitude for quotidian living

Although resilience is a contested term, lacking in universal definition, I employ the concept as an important analytical tool for investigating the experiences and identity constructions of students in higher education from the British Army. In this current study, I draw on Scheper-Hughes' (2008) work, *A Talent for Life: Reflections on Human Vulnerability and Resilience* that focuses on the violence and struggle of anti-apartheid families in the shantytowns of Northeast Brazil. Scheper-Hughes (2008) argues that the Western view of what it is to be human is framed by vulnerability, using the example of shell shock relative to traumatised soldiers returning from World War I and II. Since 1980, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), has become a medical-psychiatric condition in the DSM-111, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association and an expanded description and diagnosis now exists relating to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, kidnapping, torture, sex slavery as well as domestic violence, incest and rape. Thus, as Scheper-Hughes (2008:42) notes, shock that was originally related to trench warfare and war crimes has become extended to peace-time traumas, effectively marginalising human capacities of resilience and endurance, and 'the awesome ability of people'.

Drawing on empirical evidence Scheper-Hughes (2008:36) describes tactics of resilience in the 'every day and extraordinary' experiences encountered by street children and adults, fostering 'a talent for life' in adverse circumstances. Resilience in these circumstances is manifest in sources of 'strength, toughness, hardiness and relative immunity from personal and psychological collapse' (2008:25), illustrating the way in which quotidian events can be sites of struggle and resilience.

Different disciplinary approaches to measuring and defining resilience have led to studies that attempt to quantify the term by adopting a scientific method. Windle et al., (2011) adopt a positivistic method to their health related research, providing a methodological review of resilient scales that include measurements developed to assess the ability of individuals to recover from stress. The authors conclude statistically there is 'no single measure' of resilience (Windle et al., 2011:6) available and indicate that the psychometric scales of resilience they review all require

validation. I believe that positivist, scientific understandings of resilience cannot capture the dynamic, subjective processes that are interwoven with the concept.

I draw on Bassey's (2001) notion of fuzzy generalisations that posits a shift from scientific and statistical approaches to research that assume levels of determined causality to a more nuanced understanding that tolerates an element of uncertainty. In essence, I eschew claims of generalisations that situate resilience within fixed and static boundaries, and embrace instead the idea of fuzzy predictions that can lead to claims of best-estimate of trustworthiness (BET), enabling this research to extend beyond empirical evidence to realms of tacit and explicit knowledge.

5.1 Resilience as a student resource in higher education

Congruent with the work of Scheper-Hughes (2008) yet from an educational perspective, Walker et al., (2006) and Reay et al., (2009) challenge the way in which resilience is often taken for granted as a natural resource synonymous with stoicism. Instead, the concept is described as a dynamic, unstable, contextual construct that is inextricably linked to interpretations of how a person under stress engages with the world. Walker et al., (2006) argue resilience is an important student resource that can be developed and shaped by relational pedagogy and co-operative learning methods based on trust and identify usages of resilience concerned with endurance, adaptability and risk. Endurance resilience is a personal construct congruent with the assertion that adults over time accumulate a sense of perspective that surfaces when faced with unexpected crises. Resilience associated with adaptability implies strategy building and cognitive-behavioural processes that can be constructed to adjust positively to change. Student retention can also be aligned with resilience to risk of withdrawal and individuals likely to 'drop out'.

Little research exists that explores the way in which learners adapt and endure at higher education and the ways in which these experiences subsequently impact upon learning and retention. Instead, there is an emphasis on the roles of student autonomy and independence that obscure and denigrate the ways in which vulnerability can manifest during times of difficulty. Whilst there is no agreement regarding a definition of student autonomy, the term broadly means a learner's ability

to take charge or control of their own learning (Benson, 2001). By placing the responsibility of learning with the student, any academic or pastoral difficulties that may arise are regarded as dissonance between the learner and prescribed pedagogy. Such an understanding points to the deficit student model and implicitly suggests a lack of student resilience (Walker et al., 2006).

Critical research concerned with marginalised ethnic-minority students in higher education in the USA challenges studies that privilege student pathology and instead highlight the subtle ways in which forms of resilience contribute to and enhance the experience of under-represented scholars. Goodwin's (2002) *Resilient Spirits: Disadvantaged Students Making it at an Elite University* is a longitudinal ethnographic account that examines the nuanced processes of studenthood of socio-economically and educationally marginalised students at a prestigious university in the USA. The students experience superficial acceptance from their traditional contemporaries largely confined to a brief, passing acknowledgement that does not facilitate any in-depth relationship and encounter a sense of intimidation at the elitist practices embedded within the university ethos.

To combat these vulnerabilities, students draw on forms of resilience, constructing systems of subtle, yet strategic instrumentalism to resist and oppose academic and social practices that stigmatise and oppress (Goodwin, 2002). Such strategies, that resonate with Scott's (1985) 'weapons of the weak', involve denigrating the 'worth' of their academic achievement, in contradistinction to traditional students who are more likely to place social and cultural value on learning.

Two further studies from the USA that examine themes of resilience are provided by O'Connor (1997) and Gayles (2005). Focusing on six low-income African-American adolescents who articulate a collective awareness of how race and class discrimination constrain their life opportunities, O'Connor (1997) notes how their perceptions of struggle fail to diminish their academic success, instead contributing to their sense of agency and facilitating academic motivation. Gayles' (2005) ethnography explores themes of academic resilience in the descriptions of academic achievement by African-American students who were the first in their families to

attend college. The students related narratives of resilience by approaching academic accomplishment in a utilitarian manner and moderating the extent to which academic success separated them from their peers.

British research that specifically examines resilience in under-represented students in higher education is sparse although the term is often used superficially (Crozier, Reay, Clayton and Calliander, 2008; Kasworm, 2008; Reay et al., 2009) without definition or explanation. Crozier et al., (2008) in their study of the socio-cultural and learning experiences of working class students in higher education conclude that working class students demonstrate great resilience and commitment to their studies despite structural discrimination and oppression. Reay et al., (2009:1107) align with Walker et al., (2006) by indicating the resourceful nature of resilience by arguing that qualities of 'resilience and coping with adversity become productive resources for the working class students in the middle class contexts they have moved to – they help in dealing with the strange and unfamiliar'. Similarly, Chapman Houlton (2011:1) argues that resilient adult learners who persevere against difficult odds are brave survivors, or the 'firebirds' of the education system. Such mature learners resist educational exclusion whilst simultaneously eschewing full inclusion, leading to the conclusion that resilient adult learners 'recognise, withstand and negotiate the tension between inclusion and exclusion' (Chapman Houlton 2013:46).

In this study, everyday acts of resilience enable students from the British Army to survive the adverse practices they negotiate in higher education, fostering a 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes 2008:25) in an otherwise strange and unfamiliar milieu. Resilience is a protective carapace occurring in the space that exists between soldierhood and studenthood, currently unrecognised as a personal resource that has the potential to be stimulated and developed by a relational pedagogy built upon student growth and challenge, thus enhancing academic flourishing.

6. Identity: A term under siege

Whilst the term identity is widely and diversely utilised in the social sciences and humanities, the concept remains highly complex and hotly contested across and within academic disciplines with definitions and understandings of the term firmly

rooted in cultural understandings. Indeed, Geertz (1986:59) notes that Western concepts of people as being contained and unique individuals is a 'peculiar idea' cross culturally where qualities such as fluidity, social dependency and diffuse boundaries are more characteristic. Adding to the complexity is the way that some folk understandings of identity that posit a hidden, fixed and continual inner sense of oneself are incongruent with those of academia that argue individuals encompass many different co-existing strands that are never complete but are always in the process of being made. There are numerous ways that researchers can adopt to investigate theory and empirical analysis of identity, based on different conceptions regarding the nature of identity with some approaches seeking to elucidate the differences between individual or personal identity as related to group membership.

Goodenough (1963:177) employs an apt illustration of military service to suggest a distinction between personal and social identity, arguing that recruits who salute officers at all times 'salute(s) the uniform and not the man'. Such methods understand social identity as related to features connected with group membership that correspond with rules, rights and duties. Interestingly, Goodenough (1963:177), noted over fifty years ago that individuals exhibit a number of social identities depending on the group to which they are affiliated and consequently a 'person's identity changes all through his life'.

The reason for the continued interest in identity is contested, with sociological theorist Giddens, (1991:10) claiming that the retreat from tradition and custom in post-industrial society has resulted in unsettling social conditions, creating a sense of 'ontological insecurity' in individuals. Instead of stable and linear identities cognizant with pre-industrial society, Giddens claims that as a result of the uncertainties accompanying social and technological flux, identities are fractured and unstable, constantly being (re)constructed. Under this theoretical perspective, identity is not a set of traits or observable characteristics but an individual endeavour that involves work and reflection, ultimately becoming a 'project of the self' (1991:32).

Cohen (1994) argues that individuals and society are too multi-faceted and nuanced to be easily reconciled in the mechanical fashion as described by Giddens (1991)

highlighting instead the motivational creativity and agency of individuals, claiming that individuals can be 'architects of action' rather than 'perpetrators of doom'(Cohen, 1994:21).

French philosopher Foucault (1972) emphasises that identities or 'subjects' emerge out of dominant discourses that are tied to social arrangements and practices. Identities are attributable to the ways in which individuals respond to and are influenced by, dominant ideologies and these processes can serve to reproduce social inequalities. According to the anti-essentialist perspective of Foucault, identity is not situated within the self, but is developed by a range of discursive practices that are interwoven with dynamics of power.

According to Gergen (1991:7), the post-modern expansion of communication technologies has increased social relationships to saturation point, eroding notions of a personal sense of self that 'fails to hold'. Profound patterns of recent social change have immersed individuals ever more in the social world, resulting in people 'absorbing' opinions, values and life-style worlds of others. Through the process of social saturation, individuals reflect their infusion of partial identities (1991:49) and the concept of a personal, singular essence is 'thrown into doubt' (1991:7) reflecting Giddens' (1991) notion of ontological vulnerability. In contrast, Jenkins (1996:10) claims that there is 'nothing new' about identity and the way in which the term is articulated reflects historic and cultural movements.

Whilst there may be nothing new about identity, the rapid rise of social media sites such as Facebook provide new ways of examining how and what ways identity is expressed and constructed. Studies that investigate different typologies of social media users indicate that despite significant heterogeneity amongst users (Eynon and Malmberg, 2011), groups of people numbering tens of millions and more (Bargh and McKenna, 2004) are now utilizing the internet to build virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993). Such communities are composed of people who are unlikely to meet face to face and whose identities may be anonymous or fictitious. Valkenburg, Schouten and Peter (2005) in their investigation into the ways in which adolescents engage in internet based identity experiments, suggest that internet interaction strips

away many of the visual signs and cues that are part of social interaction, allowing individuals to 'play' with their identity.

The literature illustrates the way in which identity is always 'a never final or settled matter' (Jenkins, 1996:4), and is always a process of becoming. This relates to how individuals change and adapt to the situations they encounter which in this study refers to '*becoming* a higher education student'. The way in which participants develop a sense of personal change as they become students in higher education is traced through their stories, providing an insight into the transitions necessary to their evolving sense of studenthood. As students in higher education, military personnel mediate new relationships and experiences that foster processes of change, enduring a continual fluidity of events that Bakhtin (1993:2) refers to as 'the once occurrent and unfinished event of being', suggesting the incomplete, progressive nature of identities. The process of becoming is rarely a smooth or straightforward trajectory but is instead a complex, hazardous journey that exposes vulnerabilities and frailties.

As the above debates imply, approaches to understanding identity are diverse with one substantial area of investigation relating to what is meant by categories such as 'individual' and 'self'. Jenkins (1996:29/30) defines the 'self' as 'each individual's reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted vis-à-vis others in terms of similarity and difference, without which we would not know who we are and hence would not be able to act'. Jenkins' view of the 'self' as rooted in social relations is persuasive but lacks consideration of philosophical and neurobiological theories that situate the self as a function of corpus, or the 'body'.

6.1 Identity as enduring and essential

In the second edition of his opus, *An Essay of Human Understanding* philosopher John Locke (Newman, 2007) begins his exploration into the nature of what is meant by 'self' in classifying the term 'person', which he defines as being rational and conscious, including self-conscious. For Locke, identity is a matter of psychological continuity founded on individual consciousness or memory of experience, suggesting that identity is a personal, singular entity, remaining constant and static.

Neurobiological theorists also eschew suggestions that identity is exclusively related to sociality and emphasise instead the vital significance of a personal or private self that is inescapably braided with the body (Modell, 1993). Sacks (1990) usefully summarises Neural Darwinism as argued by Edelman (1987) by noting that it is an individual's nervous system that reflects the life experiences of a human being. The nervous system adapts, is tailored to and evolves so that experience, will, sensibility, moral sense and everything that might be termed 'identity' is engraved into the nervous system. Within this perspective, one's mind is literally one's own and is a solid essence shaped by the past (Edelman, 1987).

The notion of identity as an essential, enduring core is helpful when exploring why individuals enlist with the British Army, an area lacking in qualitative research and indicating an exciting area for future study. In order to unpick the complexity of identity formation of higher education students from the British Army, I draw upon Lortie's (1975) conceptualisation of the subjective warrant, developed to provide a pathway to understanding why some individuals chose to teach physical education. Lawson (1983) argues that the subjective warrant is important to understanding identity formation as the term illustrates the way in which individuals have a pre-disposition towards forging certain careers before processes of institutional socialisation. The stereotypical soldier is often portrayed as physically profoundly active and physically fit, heightening the perception of potential recruits to the essential requirement of maintaining physical credibility, an essential component of soldiering. Such perceptions are shaped and formed by implicit and explicit socialization practices that include family background, society influences and direct experiences. What this means in terms of identity construction is that recruits to the British Army will have a proclivity towards soldierhood that exists before enlistment.

Perspectives of identity as singular and fixed remain the dominant public narrative (Kearney 2003:50), supporting the notion of an inner sense of self remaining when even the body is eroded or injured. This has a profound salience in military terms in that the tangible essence of soldiers remains long after injury and it is this particular narrative that has come under the greatest scrutiny over the last decade with the

increasing awareness of the damaging effects of military combat on both the physical and mental spheres.

6.2 Identity as relational and performative

The idea of identity as a single, internal phenomenon is in contrast to understandings that focus on relational and comparative components that are embedded in social relations. Goffman (1990) highlights the significance of interaction in his dramaturgical analysis of 'the presentation of the self' that situates selfhood as a performance, or the acting of certain roles, arguing that identity can never be simply claimed or asserted, but requires validation by others. A similar point is made by Hall (2004:51) who claims that 'an individual's self-consciousness never exists in isolation...it always exists in relationship to an 'other' or 'others' who serve to validate existence'. Cohen (1994:68) however suggests that identity extends beyond the skills and imperative of performance, and is a synthesis of social roles that become 'grafted' on the individual rather than roles that are discarded after use.

Hochschild (1983) offers an illuminating reading of identity by introducing the notion of the 'emotional work' undertaken by airline staff. Arguing that cabin staff are often expected to be constantly obliging, Hochschild (1983) raises the idea that the 'true' self is often obscured by outside interests that can be overwhelming and consequently the 'authentic' self retreats into internal refuge. The notion of a 'real' self, emerging under 'ideal' conditions is salient with regard to the military: narratives of war and strife that bring out the 'hero' in people and letting them shine in conditions of adversity are the equivalent of modern day fables. Such heroic attributes are ones that are often replayed in popular depictions of veterans and become part of the public psyche about the qualities of heroism from which we can all supposedly benefit.

6.3 Identity as multiple, changing selves

Building on the theme of multiple selves, Soederberg and Wedell-Wedellsborg, (2005) who examine the interactions of German, Danish and Polish troops in two North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) groups, argue that it is possible for multiple strands of the self to co-exist without one dominating the other but there are

situations where an individual is required to choose between different existing characteristics of, for example nationality, soldierhood or fatherhood. In these situations, the strands of personhood are never parallel and equally important, but are instead momentarily fixed in a hierarchy and a specific decision is made because one particular affiliation is more important than another (2005:11).

Soederberg and Wedell-Wedellsborg (2005) extend Sackmann's (1997) organisational theory model investigating cultural organisations. Sackmann (1997) suggests that all organisational contexts simultaneously include culturally distinct layers, offering a number of potential identities that individuals can select from. Individuals who belong to organisations are unlikely to be restricted in their membership to one single organisational culture or sub-culture as people also identify by gender, ethnic background, locale or profession. Resonating with the work of Ware (2012) who explores the diversity of soldiers that comprise the British Army, numerous cultural identities create the cultural context of organisations.

By examining the changes in mission, context and configuration of Polish military units, Soederberg and Wedell-Wedellsborg (2005) investigate the study of identity complexity with particular reference to the military. The authors argue that existing theoretical frameworks fail to acknowledge 'existential moments' where individuals make informed choices about who to be from latent, co-existing multiple identities. In circumstances where individuals choose who they are, identities are momentarily fixed in a hierarchy in that one identity has more salience to a situation than another.

The idea that identities are ordered hierarchically and that different circumstances accentuate different identities provides a fresh approach to conceptualising identity in this study investigating identity constructions of higher education students from the British Army. Stretching beyond Giddens' (1991) idea of a 'reflexive self' and broader than the concept of an essential core as discussed by Locke (Newman, 2007), identities that surface in existential moments expose the antecedents for such choice as unconscious survival mechanisms. In circumstances of uncertainty and flux, individuals can find themselves in situations where they face a choice of who they are (Soederberg and Wedell-Wedellsborg 2005) and of who they want to be.

In higher education institutions, an important correlation can be drawn between hierarchies, identities and existential moments in monetary situations concerned with equality and diversity and the ensuing conflicting financial pressures that arise. Funding decisions are made at universities that reflect the institutional choices universities make and in so doing decide what is considered more important or superior as in, for example, decisions regarding investment and resources for student support services. Such choices may be at the expense of other financial decisions, of, perhaps teaching. These dilemmas are not straightforward dichotomies of resource versus finance, but have a distinct moral and existential component, raising the prickly issue of the type of university that emerges in practice.

7. Enlisting narrative autobiography: Joining the forces

The development of autobiographical methods as a research approach can be traced back to the Chicago school of sociology and encompasses the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1958), detailing the experiences of Polish peasants migrating to America. Other early influential autobiographical work includes Shaw's (1966) study of delinquency first published in the 1930s and Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society*. By the 1960s the approach had declined in preference to more scientific, positivistic methods until the publication of Wright Mills' (1970) *The Sociological Imagination*, emphasising the ways in which autobiographical accounts can expose intersections of history and social structures as well as the effect of these on individuals.

Concerned with how gender influenced people's lives, feminist writers in the late 1960s used autobiography to highlight marginal groups, in particular bringing the lives of some women 'out of invisibility' (Merrill and West, 2009:29), and during the 1970s and 1980s, critical theorists such as Willis (1993) and his account of *How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs* fused ethnography and biography. Since the 1980s autobiographical accounts have eschewed notions that researchers should strive for objectivity and detachment and have instead drawn attention to the way in which studies are shaped and developed by the histories and socio-cultural experiences of those who undertake research. More recently, autobiographical approaches have reflected the rise in the interest of language and discourse and the ways in which these impinge upon individuals' perceptions of themselves.

Despite the long history of autobiographical approaches, a firm definition is obscure, although Bruner (1995:165) argues that a 'good' autobiography should be able to claim representativeness and be recognisable enough to be a part of an everyday 'conversation of lives' whilst Schrader (2004:116) claims that an autobiography is 'an account of a person's life'. There are many various interchangeable expressions used throughout literature to convey an account of life; autobiography, biography, narrative and life story despite differences between these terms however, in this study exploring the experiences and identity constructions of higher education students from the British Army, I use the term educational autobiography to describe narratives of learning experiences.

The literature suggests that people are tellers of stories (Bruner, 1990, 2004; McAdams, 1993; Ochs and Capps, 1996) and stories, or narratives are a way of telling about our lives. Smith and Sparkes (2008) reveal that as social animals, people organise their experiences into narratives and assign meaning to them through storytelling, helping to constitute and construct realities and modes of being. Meaning is created, organised and expressed through narratives to the extent that Bruner (2004:694) claims 'we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives'.

By telling stories people fashion an understanding of who they are, creating a storied self or sense of identity that is highly susceptible to social and cultural influences (Bruner, 2004) and in this sense narrative involves not only the construction of identity but also a construction and transmission of one's culture (Bruner 2001:35). As Bruner (1990) argues, matters of identity and autobiography are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others that shape our ideas of who we are and how we are related. Learning to tell these stories, and to comprehend and evaluate them, and to understand which stories to tell in order to achieve a particular goal, is the 'culture of education' (Bruner, 1996). What is most apparent from the large body of work concerned with the process of narrative autobiography and identity is the way in which it is firmly enmeshed with communication and language.

Theoretically, I draw on existing theories of narrative and identity as extrapolated from the literary work of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) who I believe provides a metaphorical bridge between the broadly deterministic ideas of Bourdieu's habitus (1977) that associates identity with embodiment and Foucault's (1972) restrictive, non-agentic concept of discourse that points to regulating institutional ideology. Bakhtin's (1981) perspective, referred to as dialogism, eschews semantics and places emphasis on the ontological, relational nature of dialogue as being a way of living a life that involves 'somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone is one's own interior addressee' (1981:xxi). What this affords in this study is a way of understanding the conversations that individuals have privately in their minds concerning who they may be, particularly with reference to lay conceptions of a fixed, single narrative.

Western and European narrative identity theories that privilege cohesion and coherence are challenged by Bakhtin (1981) who draws attention to the centripetal and centrifugal forces of the social world, producing the dynamic tensions of selfhood. For Bakhtin (1981), the struggle of identity is played out against the centripetal influences that pull individuals towards a complete and coherent sense of self therefore obstructing reflexive growth, whilst centrifugal influences seek towards keeping things apart, unfinished and incomplete, facilitating reflection and change. The dynamic created from these competing forces results in stories about life, and possible stories about potential life, as well as numerous combinations of the same that can be treated as 'without end' (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001:8) or 'unfinalizable' (Bakhtin 1973:53).

In his exploration of the work of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin notes:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness's, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels...what unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness: rather a plurality of consciousness's, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event (Bakhtin 1984:6 cited in Shields 2007:39)

What this means in terms of narrative and identity is that individuals are more than a single and unified identity but are an assemblage of interdependent voices that remain separate, never merging. Bakhtin (1981:272) refers to the term heteroglossia to indicate the contextual specificity of centrifugal forces, explaining that the various professional languages of for example a lawyer, doctor or businessman will differ from each other in terms of their specialised vocabularies. These specific languages are related hierarchically with dialogical interaction occurring within textualised heteroglossia creating potentially position-altering effects (Vice, 1997:18) and alluding to the multiple, conflicting identities that a person may express.

An autobiographical approach elicits nuanced information about the socio-cultural context, reflecting the ebb and flow of social life as well as examining the structural and agentic influences on an individual's life (Pitman, 2013). These are very relevant considerations for this current study as my investigation concerns the experiences and identity constructions of higher education students from the British Army and it is important therefore that I provide appropriate contextual information regarding the (constant) intersections of economic, social and cultural influences.

In this research, I use the term narrative to describe when the account told emphasises particular key moments, events and times. Yair (2008) notes that little educational research exists that examines the 'key educational experiences' or what Bruner (2001) terms 'turning points' of students in higher education that manifest as short and intense episodes that students believe to have had a decisive effect on their lives (Yair, 2008). By employing an educational autobiographical approach the impact of these specific experiences are described not as isolated moments frozen in time but how such experiences impinge upon the present, whilst also affording the opportunity of a (re) sorting of life events that may create newly fashioned narratives (Sandelowski, 1991).

Dews and Law (1995:5) argue that 'only autobiography is a sensitive enough instrument to register the subtle activity of social class in a milieu in which class is supposedly a non-factor', and that autobiography can explode the illusion upon which higher education is maintained, that everyone is middle class because 'we are here'.

Narrative autobiography is also used by Baker and Brown (2008) in their study of disadvantaged students from rural Wales, demonstrating the way in which culture, history and national identity impinge and affect the aspiration of higher education students. Merrill (2004) and Reay (2002) employ autobiographies to illuminate the way in which adult learners construct, act and give meaning to their lives whilst Pitman (2013:31) claims only autobiography can provide 'information that other approaches cannot'.

The above work illuminates the importance of detail in understanding experiences and the interplay of subtle and nuanced practices, reconciling the contradictory, complex and multiple dimensions that comprise experience and identity.

8. Summary

In this chapter I present the conceptual framework to my research that explores the experiences and identity constructions of students in higher education from the British Army. I explore what it may be like to be a soldier in the British Army, drawing on literature from the USA to examine the experiences of military personnel in higher education, who are often discursively framed as needing support.

Following this, I investigate what is meant by the term social class and how this mediates experience for students in higher education from the working class, paying particular attention to institutional practices and policies in addition to pedagogical influences.

I provide an overview of the major changes to higher education in order to provide situational context, beginning with the expansions of the 1960s that sought to diversify the demography of the student population, particularly those from disadvantaged social classes.

Then I introduce and examine literature concerned with the concept of resilience as a student resource that can be harnessed and shaped in higher education by co-operative pedagogical practices. Such a resource can mitigate the adverse circumstances that many under-represented students encounter, contributing to student flourishing.

Theoretically I investigate what is meant by the term identity and finally explore how employing narrative autobiography can help capture what is an otherwise elusive and slippery concept.

Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

3.1 Research design

Overview

This study is designed to examine the beliefs and practices of higher education students from the British Army and is guided by two key purposes:

- To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students in UK higher education that have served, or are still serving, in the British Army
- To investigate how notions of identity affect the education encounters of this particular group of students

I explore four research questions:

1. What are the educational autobiographies of a group of British Army personnel that have studied, or are studying, in higher education?
2. What are the higher educational experiences of this group of students?
3. What particular military and academic identities do these students possess and self-perceive when studying in higher education?
4. How and to what extent do these identities intersect, collide and coalesce?

Research Design in Practice

I investigate the higher education experiences of students who have served, or are serving still, in the British Army. Military students may be regarded as analogous to other mature learners at higher education, but an important difference is that their life experiences have been indelibly shaped by encounters that most other people may find difficult to comprehend. Military personnel undertake intense and distinctive training; overseas deployment in war zones and, in many cases will have engaged in armed combat that may potentially result in long lasting physical and/or psychological trauma. Research suggests that whilst a number of British Army personnel make a smooth transition to civilian life at the end of their careers, some fare less well and face social exclusion. MacManus and Wessely (2011), identify three

overlapping groups of vulnerable people who may experience social exclusion: those from disadvantaged backgrounds; those who experience mental health problems or physical injury whilst in the forces; and those who enjoyed successful military careers but have difficulty adjusting to civilian life.

Literature from the USA suggests that when engaged with learning in higher education institutions, students who have served in the military face 'culture shock' (Glasser, Powers and Zywiak, 2009), selectively discussing their military experiences (Rumann and Hamrick, 2009) and being reluctant to seek academic and/or pastoral support (Cate, Gerber and Holmes, 2010; Ormerod, 2009). Rudd, Goulding and Bryan, (2011:358) reveal that some veteran students experience significant psychiatric problems, potentially at an increased risk of suicide. For military students, the transition to higher education is further complicated by the shift from a culture where 'authority is absolute' (Zinger and Cohen, 2010:40), to an environment where an unclear hierarchy, confusing job titles and systems of student support appear disorderly and disconcerting (Coll, Oh, Joyce, Coll and Craig, 2009). Wheeler (2012) argues that the majority of military personnel are expected to obey orders, accustomed to swift reprimands, expect nothing less than perfection, and have unwavering respect for their chain of command as well as being fiercely loyal to other soldiers. The disparity between military culture and education is also discussed by Gulf War veteran Alex Vernon, (2006) now Professor of English at Hendrix College, USA, who argues that academia values tolerance, dialogue, creativity, striving to nurture multiple points of view whilst in contrast, the military values authority, utilitarianism and resolution through force.

Military experience is viewed as a major turning point in people's lives that induces long-lasting changes, (Elder, Gimbel and Ivie, 1991; Elder, 1986) affecting the life course of the individual (Settersten, 2006). As a result of military experience, students who have served in the British Army encounter a unique life trajectory that is different to that of traditional higher education students.

Widening participation initiatives emerging as a result of the publication, *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE, 1998) have sought to encourage a more

diverse student population in an attempt to move away from elitist conceptualisations of higher education. However, research suggests that studying has become more difficult rather than easier for non-traditional students (Burke, 2012; Moss, 2004). Marandet and Wainwright (2010) suggest that non-traditional students have been merely 'added on' to existing educational practices without attention to specific retention and progression issues, highlighting the imperative of understanding the experiences of military students.

As a student population that is unrecognised and unidentified in higher education, the experiences of students who have served in the British Army are currently obscure from the gaze of social science investigators, becoming lives without trace in the higher education context. Research that investigates 'lives' requires a methodological approach able to draw out the subtle and nuanced feelings, beliefs and experiences of people. Thus a major concern relates to validity as evidence suggests (Goffman, 1990; McAdams, 1993) that individuals may recall and perform varying accounts of themselves in different contexts. Particularly, people may malign their past in order to balance their own tacit understandings of change and this can particularly occur when students are asked to share their educational experiences (Conway and Ross, 1984).

The research I carried out in 2009 commissioned by the Anthropology Department and Foundation Programme, Durham University, has informed my methodological choice. This earlier research involved semi-structured, face to face and email interviews with eleven students attending Durham University that had served in the Armed Forces. On reflection, my data analysis failed to provide an holistic approach, that could have provided the study with more depth and deeper understanding of the educational context relating to the individual students' experiences. In the current study I have endeavoured to enrich comprehension of the issues facing students who have served in the British Army by broadening the scope of my investigation.

As a result of the above study, I am aware of the responsibility researchers undertake when studying concepts such as 'experiences' and 'feelings'. Listening to the voices of students who have served in the military entails transforming these encounters into

a form of public knowledge. Whilst the students' own knowledge may be liable to the influence of covert practices in their everyday lives I am also aware of compounding this situation by turning the voices of participants into mere 'research findings' (Brannen, 2005:10) and I have therefore endeavoured to be critically reflective throughout this study.

I have considered a range of paradigmatic and theoretical movements with regard to this research. A paradigm is a way of looking at the world that is composed of certain philosophical assumptions. Mertens (2010) explains that paradigms guide researchers in terms of what they observe and study, the nature of the questions they ask participants, how these questions are phrased and how findings are interpreted. The worldview held by me, as researcher, inevitably shapes my chosen research methodology and therefore it is imperative that I consider my own philosophical viewpoint.

The two major paradigms of positivism and interpretivism frame discussions regarding research methodology and the basic beliefs or assumptions of these worldviews influence epistemology, ontology and axiology. Assumptions underpinning these methodologies can be viewed as dichotomous but I agree with Marshall and Rossman (2011) who suggest they can be more usefully perceived as continua. Positivism, or the 'scientific method' produces quantitative data and seeks objectivity, measurability and controllability. Ontologically, a positivist worldview assumes that reality is ultimately material and therefore can only be known through observation. Conversely, an interpretive worldview assumes that reality is necessarily partly constituted by interpretation and can only be known by attending to hermeneutic meanings. Therefore, an interpretivist methodology selects and develops methods that investigate meanings, relying on linguistic methods, for example phenomenology (Wiggins, 2011).

Broadly speaking, positive and interpretive paradigms are essentially concerned with understanding phenomena through lenses that are preoccupied with technical and hermeneutic knowledge respectively (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) and cannot address the fine-grained issues outlined earlier that are crucial to this study. Positive

and interpretive paradigms can only present a partial and incomplete account of the phenomena under research, which in this study is the higher education experience of students from the British Army.

Researching students who have served in the army requires a method that captures not only human experience but also exposes the complex and muddy intersections of historical, social, and political influences. Importantly, my methodology must also interrogate the discursive practices that fail to recognise students from the British Army as a specific student population. Issues of student oppression, inequality, exclusion and diversity at higher education are significant and contestable areas within social science research and as my research is firmly situated at the heart of these issues I draw on a critical and emancipatory methodology.

My methodological framework engages with the emotional and experiential aspects of military students' subjective experiences, identities, relations and inequalities at higher education. Critical and emancipatory methodologies eschew epistemological perspectives that claim research should be neutral, apolitical and value-free. Instead, critical and emancipatory methodologies argue that knowledge generated via social and educational research is necessarily partial, grounded by certain values and ontological worldviews. In addition, critical and emancipatory approaches expose the ways in which knowledge and power are inseparably interwoven and stitched into issues of class, gender and race. As a critical and emancipatory researcher, I pay particular attention to the words of students from the British Army who have been silenced, excluded and pathologised due to the regulating and normalising gaze of some forms of social science research (Burke, 2012:70).

Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) claim that critical emancipatory research should exhibit the following characteristics and these guiding principles form a foundation to this study:

- Democratic – enabling participation of people
- Equitable – acknowledging people's equality of worth
- Liberating – providing freedom from oppressive conditions

- Enhancing – enabling the expression of people’s full human potential

Theoretically, I align my research to the transformative paradigm. According to Mertens, Bledsoe, Sullivan and Wilson (2010) the rise of the transformative paradigm is due to dis-satisfaction with and recognition of the limitations relative to dominant research paradigms. Feminists, people of colour, indigenous and postcolonial peoples, differently and (dis)abled, lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual and queer communities are advocates of the transformative paradigm. Indeed, writing from the perspective of disability studies, Oliver (1992) claims that the transformative paradigm directly addresses the politics in research by confronting social oppression.

Whilst there is no uniform body of literature that is representative of the transformative paradigm, four key characteristics distinguish the approach from positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Mertens, Farley, Maddison and Singleton, (1994) identify these as:

- Central importance placed on the lives and experiences of marginalised groups and the way oppression is structured and reproduced
- Investigating of how and why inequalities are reflected in asymmetric power relationships
- How results of social inquiry on inequities are linked to political and social action
- Uses transformative theory in the research approach

These key features are particularly relevant to my research investigating the education experiences of students from the British Army who I argue are a marginalised group within higher education institutions. Uncovering how and in what ways student marginalisation occurs necessitates a close examination of oppressive hegemonic practices and an exposure of constructed power relations that result in inequalities within educational contexts.

According to the four assumptions identified by Guba and Lincoln (2005) the transformative axiological assumption takes precedence and rests on the recognition

of power differences and ethical implications that derive from those differences in terms of discrimination, oppression, misrepresentation and marginalisation (Mertens, Holmes and Harris, 2009). Ontologically, the transformative paradigm rejects cultural relativism and instead recognises the influence of privilege in determining what is real. I believe that versions of reality are broadly, but not entirely, socially constructed by a variety of issues that include historical, social, political and economic factors. It is important therefore that I critically and constantly examine what is perceived to be reality, in order to expose perpetuating oppressive social structures (Mertens et al., 2010).

The transformative axiological and ontological assumptions lead to the epistemological assumption that the relationship between the researcher and participants is a crucial consideration in achieving an understanding of valid knowledge. Hidden relations of power, control and inequality between the researcher and the researched are investigated according to the transformative paradigm.

The methodological assumption aligned with the transformative paradigm reflects the three beliefs discussed above and has led me to utilise a mixed method study design. Brannen (2005) argues it is the way in which mixed methods are used to explore social inequality and power differentials that define the approach, whilst Tashakorri and Creswell (2007:4) define mixed methods as 'research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study'. Although there has been a recent surge of interest in mixed method research, according to Green (2008), the approach emerged approximately twenty years ago and has developed through various social and health science disciplines.

By adopting a mixed method research design, I question the perceived dichotomy relating to the assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research and argue that by replacing dichotomy with continuum, it is possible to see threads of commonalities. As Sandelowski, Voils and Knafl (2009:209) point out, 'qualitative and quantitative data are not so much different kinds of data *as these data are experiences* formed into words or numbers respectively'. Within this understanding, the commonality that

connects the dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative data is the 'something experienced' that generates the data in the first instance (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010).

Creswell et al., (2003:150) suggest there are four main design criteria for mixed method research; implementation; priority; integration; and theoretical perspective. Implementation relates to the rank in which data are collected, which may be sequential or concurrent. The sequential design can commence with either qualitative or quantitative data and analysis which is then followed by the other type of data and analysis. Researchers that employ concurrent designs gather and analyse the two types of data at the same time. The criterion of priority relates to the type of data that is given precedence in the study and integration is the phase of research during which the two modes of data are combined and analysed.

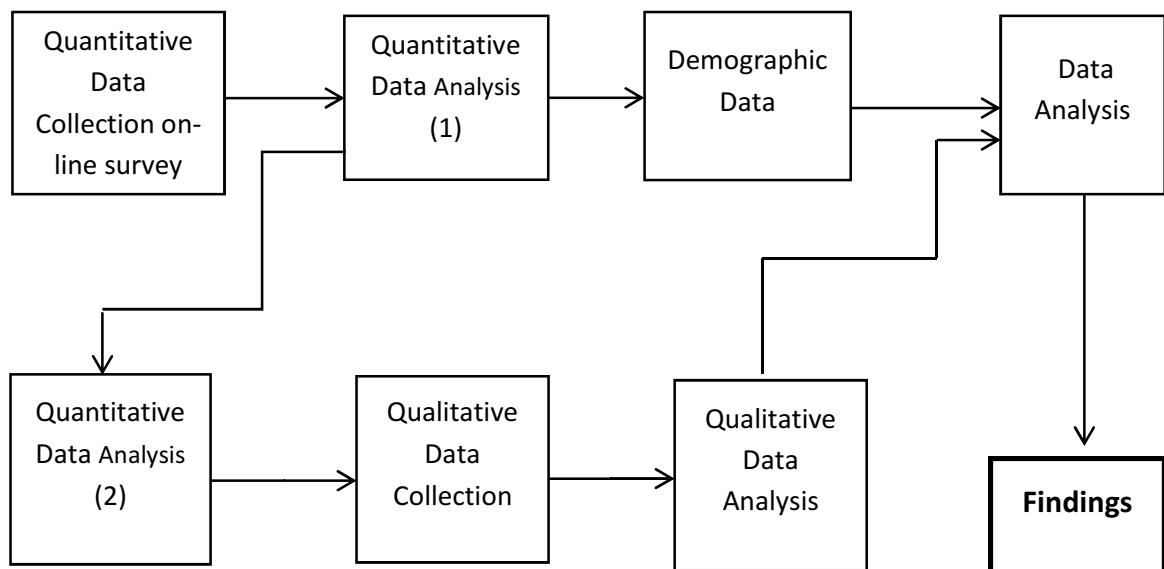
From the above criteria, Creswell et al., (2003:223) proposes six major research designs, although the list is not exhaustive. The six comprise sequential explanatory; sequential exploratory; sequential transformative; concurrent triangulation; concurrent nested and concurrent transformative. As scarce research has been carried out in the UK regarding higher education students that have served in the military, I have selected a sequential transformative design framework that commences with the collection of quantitative data. This approach enables an initial data analysis to produce important contextual demographic statistics, relating to participants' length of service, age and academic area of interest. My examination of the initial data will guide the interview protocol that comprises the qualitative stage of the sequential design. Meadow-Orlans et al., (2003) provide an example of a transformative sequential mixed method design in their investigation of parents' experiences with young deaf and hearing impaired children. Their study involved three sequential phases: a quantitative survey; interviews; and focus groups.

Researchers that use a sequential design can place deeper emphasis on either the quantitative or qualitative stage. In my research, the qualitative component takes precedence for the following reasons. My research is primarily concerned with the every-day experiences of students that have served in the military and therefore it is

crucial that I capture their subjective worldview. I believe that when researching marginalised groups, findings cannot be reduced to statistics or comprehended holistically without an explanation of the broader context in which higher education students are constructively situated. By utilising both qualitative and quantitative data, I believe the strengths of each approach counter-balance their individual perceived weaknesses.

Visual displays within mixed method research provide a powerful synthesis of data and form (Dickinson, 2010) whilst also explaining how the data is integrated. A representation of my design is included at Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Visual representation of the study design



As I investigate the subjective experiences of British Army students in higher education my research epistemology encourages the telling of stories as these reveal human experience. The telling of stories has a long tradition, allowing individuals to construct and reconstruct one's past and future, enabling them to find meaning in their experiences (McAdams, 1993) by creating a sense of order and enabling the navigation of relationships with others (Riessman, 2008).

My research epistemology is narrative autobiography. During the past twenty years, autobiography has become a significant research approach within the social sciences,

sharing in the growth in popularity of qualitative research. This rise is due to a developing disillusion with static approaches to data collection, growing interest in the life course and an increased concern with the lived experience and how best this can be expressed and captured (Roberts, 2002).

Studies that view the individual in isolation from wider societal contexts are now challenged by autobiographical studies that situate the individual as being inextricably linked to the social relations of institutions such as work, health and education (Roberts, 2002). Merrill (2007:71) suggests autobiographical research is never individualistic as by constructing an autobiography, significant others and social contexts are always intertwined. Autobiographical research offers a way to gain insight into the complex relations between individuals' particular experiences, meanings and action strategies as well as their social and societal context. I have chosen a narrative autobiographical epistemology as this approach considers the stories people tell to comprise rich and meaningful data that assist in understanding the thinking and behaviour of individuals (Stroobants, 2005). As a research method, an autobiographical approach eschews hegemonic modes of analysis that examine educational life in terms of education effectiveness and efficiency (Tierney, 1993).

Critics of the above method emphasise a range of concerns. Spence (1986) cautions against 'narrative smoothing' and Connelly and Clandinin (1990:10) point to the danger of 'The Hollywood Plot' whereby 'everything works out well in the end' and data deemed unnecessary or inappropriate can be obscured. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) refer to the genre of personal autobiographical narratives as 'sentimental' and challenge the format of empathetic face to face interviews. In response, Bochner (2001) suggests that personal narratives are primarily contested because the approach threatens the privilege that has traditionally been granted to orthodox, analytical social science.

The value of using a narrative autobiographical method for my study of higher education students from the British Army is that such an approach can explicate the subtle, fine grained nuances of individual experience and the way in which these inter-relate to broader societal and institutional contexts. In contrast to quantitative

studies, autobiographical research enables a greater understanding and insight in to the way British Army personnel engage with learning in higher education, their institutional experiences of learning and the impact of learning upon identities. Narrative autobiography affords people the opportunity to verbalise the potential transformations that education affords (Tedder, 2012). Baker and Brown (2008) for example, utilise narrative biographical methods to explore the ways in which disadvantaged adult students from rural Wales successfully enter and navigate their way through university.

The key characteristic of narrative biographical research is that it enquires into the way that people make sense of their lives through the collection, analysis and representation of stories about individual experiences of life. The most common data collection method is the personal interview, a request to someone to relate stories about their life by either a singular occasion or by a series of encounters.

The researcher's role and beliefs

As a mature student in higher education, I have a particular understanding of what is meant by education, what learning entails and what the student experience might consist of. To me, education offers hope, but learning is tough and the student experience can be both liberating and oppressive. In my youth, attending university was for other people, utterly inconceivable for someone of my background whose paternal grandfather spent his entire working life as a porter at Billingsgate Fish Market, London.

Whilst these may not appear solid rocks on which to build a PhD study, I believe my fractured and chequered educational history has privileged me with an 'insider' account of being a non-traditional student in higher education. I do however, realise that dominant discourses of knowledge, communication and practice in higher education will vary significantly between institutions and disciplines (Ballard and Clancy, 1988). Nevertheless, my familiarity with an academic culture and my own position as a non-traditional student affords me the advantage of having some personal knowledge and currency of the phenomenon under study despite the foggy and fluid boundaries that surround 'insider' status. In essence, I have occupied a

betwixt and between researcher position that has enabled a more balanced relationship than might otherwise have been possible, fostering a unique engagement with participants, assisting me in faithfully producing work respectful of their views and comments.

3.2 Selection procedures

I employ a sequential transformative mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data, although the qualitative component takes clear precedence. Consequently, I place more weight on the representativeness of the qualitative data to address requirements of selection and external validity. I consider this appropriate as the everyday experiences of students from the British Army form the cornerstone of my study rather than a focus on statistical analysis.

In describing how the setting, context and participants are selected, I establish the scope and limitations of this research as well as the boundaries which enhance this study's transferability (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

Setting of the research

In this study, I aim to gain an understanding of the higher educational experiences of students from the British Army. Experiences of people cannot be studied without exposing the wider contexts that influence and shape them, particularly when such contexts are often played out within discursive practices. The research takes place during a time of turbulent change within the institution of the British Army. Reflecting the changes of modern warfare and budget reductions, the Strategic Defence and Security Review (H.M. Government, 2010) commissioned by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government recommended 17,000 military personnel redundancies by 2015. Consequently, a large number of military personnel will potentially be adapting to civilian life earlier than they may have planned. Despite acquiring a range of skills whilst serving with the British Army, some personnel may find employment problematic due to their age, lack of accredited qualifications and career availability. Under these circumstances it is possible that more military personnel will engage with higher education, particularly in view of the Government

pledge outlined in Chapter One providing free university tuition to eligible military personnel at the end of their careers.

Simultaneously, the School's White Paper (DfE, 2010), outlined the Coalition Government's commitment to encouraging ex-Armed Forces personnel to become teachers and to work in schools as mentors. Following a £1.5 million grant to the Charity, Skillforce, that provides training, former military personnel 'fast track' to become exemplars to young people in schools across England. Three pilot schemes commenced in September 2011 enabling ex-service personnel to be swiftly placed in schools using the skills and experience gained during military service to help young people achieve academically. Public response to this initiative was not entirely enthusiastic, with a degree of moral panic promoted by media headlines proclaiming 'Ex-Troops called up to discipline pupils and sort out problem schools' (Loveys, 2011) implicitly suggesting military personnel may administer an authoritarian sense of 'control' to unruly pupils.

A further important contemporary military aspect is the ebb and flow of public support, particularly with regard to attitudes concerning increasing casualties and unpopular recent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Both the Government and general public have sustained criticism for their perceived disrespect towards the Armed Forces (McCartney, 2010), the Government in terms of a lack of military funding and the public in terms of dwindling support. The tide of public opinion also reflects the nation's growing concern for the welfare of serving injured personnel – as manifest in the 2007 launch of the Charity, Help for Heroes.

Higher education institutions are also adapting to changes aligned to increasing student diversity, higher tuition fees and tighter institutional funding opportunities. Despite the landscape of higher education undergoing substantial change and transformation to widen the range of students who participate, persistent patterns of under-representation continue to raise important questions regarding current strategies, policies and approaches (Burke, 2012) and the composition of the student body.

These wider societal contexts demonstrate the shifting and contested nature of what it is to be a member of the British Army and a student in higher education providing fertile grounds for questions and investigations into this student group who currently inhabit the dark shadows of their educational institutions.

Process of selection of participants

Nineteen participants take part in this research, recruited via purposive sampling (Bernard, 2006). All respondents had served or were currently serving in the British Army and had, or were still, attending a UK higher education institution.

A continual concern throughout this research has been that I present a faithful, inclusive portrayal of the experiences of my participants. I have been mindful that some research, for example, Walker (2010:94), who investigates the transition of military personnel to civilian life, excludes Reservists, Territorial Army members, 'very Senior Officers (Brigadier and above)' and 'those injured in combat'. Similarly, McDermott (2007) who explores the transitions of British Army personnel to civilian careers restricted his work to participants who had served for a full career of twenty-two years. To encompass a more representative sample of participants, this study did not exclude by rank, injury or length of service and includes members of the Army Reserve.

I have aimed to be as inclusionary as is possible with my research – indeed I am strongly of the view that, if participants have taken the time to join the research website, complete the online survey and spare time to speak with me they warrant inclusion. Consequently, participants in my research have a rich variety of backgrounds: those still serving in the British Army; those who left some years ago; those who are attached to the Territorial Reserve; those who served for a short period of time; and those who served a full career. Such a broad inclusionary strategy may provoke an inference that the participants' disparate backgrounds could undermine research findings. My response is to stress that my research focus is the *experiences* these personnel encountered at higher education and, as all my participants fulfil the criteria of having served in the British Army, their views and opinions are thus important, valued and relevant to my research.

Informed consent and permissions

Ethical permission for this research was granted by the Research Ethics and Data Protection Committee, Department of Anthropology in June 2011 (A). Obtaining participants' informed consent is essential for the ethical behaviour of the researcher (Rossman and Rallis, 2003) and are requirements of the above Committee. All forms and questions emerging from this study were compiled under the ethical principles discussed by Rossman and Rallis (2003:75) who suggest informed consent should rest on the principles of transparency; an understanding of the participant's agreement to participate; willing consent; and the right to withdraw without prejudice or penalty. A copy of the Informed Consent form can be found at Appendix B and the participant information sheet at Appendix C.

Assurance of confidentiality

Whilst informed consent and permissions can assure participants of privacy and anonymity, additional important factors relative to confidentiality concern the security of the collected data and the well-being of participants. A number of participants expressed their concern regarding army doctrine, as enshrined in guidelines for personnel action, character and behaviour, known as *The Values and Standards of the British Army* (British Army, 2008, para.24) prohibiting personnel to 'disclose information or express views on official matters or experiences to any media organisation without prior approval'. Whilst my request for participants is not the same as a request from a media organisation, it was clear to me that there existed an air of suspicion by some participants. Indeed, one asked "Who are you working for?" (*Brandon*) and another, "Who will see this report?" (*Charles*). Under these restrictive conditions, participants placed themselves in a situation of potential personal jeopardy and it was therefore imperative that I securely stored all data to protect their privacy. This was achieved by keeping online survey responses, notes, recordings, writings and interview transcripts in a locked cabinet in a secure location. All personal names and military locations were replaced as soon as practicable with pseudonyms. All stored computer files had password protection.

The well-being of my participants has been a particular consideration throughout this study. By adopting a narrative biographical methodology, participants tell stories about the influence of their military careers and how this has shaped their higher educational experiences. I have been aware that this methodological approach may be intrusive, exposing physical and emotional situations leading potentially to feelings of vulnerability. As an ethical researcher, I have sought to balance the potential for harm against the benefits from the outcomes of this research for the participants and the others they represent (Bold, 2012). Consequently, I have been mindful to avoid any sense of coercion of my participants, being particularly sensitive to how they choose to tell their stories.

Gaining access and entry

Gaining access to students in higher education institutions proved problematic. A number of universities rejected my request for assistance citing the Data Protection Act (1998) whereby institutions are obliged to protect personal information. Other educational institutions initiated other means to inform their students by asking for a poster of the research (Appendix D) or involved Student Union representatives. Requests for participants were initially sent via e-mail (Appendix E) to all higher education institutions receiving funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). I then followed up individual expressions of interest (Appendix F). In view of the mixed institutional response, I took a creative turn to optimise potential participant numbers by e-mailing requests for participants to military magazines *Soldier* and *British Legion* and with the social networking site ARRSE, (ARmy Rumour SErvice).

3.3 Data collection procedures

I utilise four approaches to collect data for this study: a specifically designed internet website; an on-line survey; interviews via Skype, telephone and face to face; my research field notes. I began data collection at the beginning of January 2012 and ceased at the end of June 2012. In the next section, I describe the data collection procedures, explaining my rationale for their selection. Figure 4 illustrates how the research questions are aligned with the data collection methods.

Figure 4 - Research questions and data collection methods

Research Questions and Demographic Data	Website	Online survey	Interviews	Field notes
What are the educational biographies of British Army personnel who have studied, or are studying in higher education?		✓	✓	✓
What are the higher educational experiences of this group of students?		✓	✓	✓
What military and academic identities do students from the British Army possess and self-perceive when studying in higher education?		✓	✓	✓
How and to what extent do these identities intersect, collide and coalesce?		✓	✓	✓
Demographic Data	✓	✓		

Website

Internet technology is being incorporated into ever more aspects of daily life and enables researchers to promote their research to as wide an audience as possible and assists with reaching hard to find populations. To gather data for this research, I designed and created an internet website, *enlistzenrol.com* using templates provided by a low cost programme provider. This simple sentence obscures the extreme technical challenges I faced in creating a website! Following a trial of *elistzenrol.com* by colleagues to assess clarity of purpose, ease of use and design, I developed the final website (Appendix G i -ii).

The front page of *enlistzenrol.com* outlined the purpose and aims of my research, as well as assurances of confidentiality as well as my credentials and contact details.

Interested participants were invited to become members of the site and set up their own profile page. Participants were requested to provide brief initial details relating to age, military career and higher education biography.

Originally, the website was created to foster an on-line community for participants. I hoped the site would become an active, thriving site for discussions between higher education students who had served in the military and their educational experiences. Despite many attempts to rouse conversation on the internet site, by placing commentary on a regular basis, my participants did not create the thriving online discussions I anticipated. When it became clear that this aspect of my research approach had stalled, I asked some of my participants why they had been reluctant to take part in online conversations.

Overall, they suggested that online discussions were not appropriate for three main reasons. First, this approach fails to take into account the maturity of respondents who may not be familiar with social network sites. Second, there was a lack of time available to take part in online conversations and third, the website was viewed with a sense of suspicion by some participants.

Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff and Cui, (2009) argue that the distinction between online and offline worlds is becoming less useful as activities in these realms increasingly merge together whilst others (Hine, 2000; Lysloff, 2003) claim that virtual sites of research differ greatly from traditional settings. I concur with poststructuralist thinking that dichotomous understandings are unhelpful and that virtual sites of research are not separate from other aspects of human action and experience but instead form part of a continuum of encounters.

Apart from providing essential personal information relating to age, length of military service and educational details, the website enabled a sense of trust and rapport to be developed between myself and participants, promoting a more equal balance of power as participants were able to ask questions and challenge the purpose, aims and questions of my research at any time, more easily than may have been possible in a face to face situation. A good example of the positive use of internet technology is demonstrated by the Veteran Success Jam, (American Council on Education, 2010) a

three day online brainstorming event that took place in the USA in 2010. The occasion brought together thousands of veterans and their families, service members, campus leaders, non-profit organisations and government agencies in a virtual conversation about the challenges and opportunities facing veterans in higher education.

However, there are several areas of concern regarding internet research that relate to ethics, code of conduct and good practice. Kaczmirek (2008) suggests a violation of informed consent and anonymity occurs if participant internet provider-addresses and browser information are spuriously collected by the researcher and passed onto other interested parties. Such confidential material has not been collected in my study and is not included in any dataset.

Requirements of confidentiality and anonymity entail that internet and survey data should be protected and secure. The UK Data Protection Act (1998) provides individuals with certain rights regarding information held about them and places obligations on those who are responsible for processing personal data and gives rights to those who are the subject of that data. In the UK there is an overarching data protection framework based on European Union directives and many of the privacy protections find their basis in Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950). I included on the website an internet link to an online survey.

On-line survey

Significant to this research, the internet provides a way of accessing hard-to reach groups. I expected participants to be familiar with computer and internet use and believed that participants may be more willing to fill in survey details if they were reluctant to be interviewed. Gathering important demographic data was also a reason and finally, I anticipated that the survey responses would provide a baseline for the second component of my research, the interviews.

I selected a free internet survey format from a selection of readily available templates allowing for various survey configurations and features. A pilot of the survey was

carried out with friends and colleagues resulting in constructive feedback. The original format was amended to a more streamlined and succinct survey.

The survey format is not without critique. As Bernard (2006) claims, researchers lack control over how participants interpret questions and there is always a danger that respondents will misunderstand what is being asked, and there is no guarantee that the participant is the person who completed the survey. However, with regard to my research the follow up interview ensures a level of authenticity.

A list of the internet survey questions is available at Appendix H. The survey contained an introductory section pertaining to ethical issues, followed by open-ended questions designed to capture the military autobiography of students and draw out their higher education experiences. I formulated the questions after researching contextual issues pertinent to this research, defining the apparent gaps in knowledge relating to the higher education experiences of students that have served in the British Army. Participants were asked to provide contact details if they were willing to take part in an interview.

Interviews

Interviews can produce in-depth personal narratives from participants that may not be captured by questionnaires or surveys. In accordance with the transformative paradigm, one of the aims of this research is to offer my participants a certain amount of choice over the research process, fostering a greater sense of equity between myself and participants. A small step towards ensuring this aim was taken in offering interviewees a choice to take part in telephone or Skype interviews. Face to face interviews were also offered to participants living within a reasonable radius of Queen's Campus, Stockton.

I carried out a total of 19 interviews during January 2012 to July 2012. All interviews commenced with a protocol that had been prepared in advance, informing participants of: the aim of my research; their freedom to terminate the interview at any time; details regarding the recording of our conversation; the fact that our discussion would be transcribed and might form part of my PhD research. I prepared

in advance a short individual interview guide based on responses to the online survey but this was only loosely adhered to as I specifically wanted participants to talk about what was important to them.

I cannot claim that any of my interviews followed a rigid structured or semi-structured approach. Instead, I prefer to think of them as 'conversations with a purpose' that Rossman and Rallis (2003:183) describe as a meaningful conversation, where both parties have a genuine, although temporary interest in the topic under discussion. Loosely guided by my aide memoire, a flow developed between questions and responses that started with my asking 'So, tell me about your military career' and led on to questions relating to their higher education experiences. As conversations, the interviews yielded narrative autobiographies in the form of stories that had a form of organisation related to the questions I asked.

Skype

Two interviews were undertaken using the internet programme Skype, lasting between 50 – 80 minutes. As a research medium, Skype allows the researcher to reap the benefits of both face to face and telephone interviews (Hanna, 2012). A practical advantage of internet interviewing is the freedom to re-arrange at the last minute if necessary. Being able to adapt easily to interview changes was very advantageous for this research as the demographic of participants covered the country.

Hanna (2012) suggests that Skype software enables synchronous interaction between the researcher and their participants whilst preserving flexibility and a sense of private space, claiming that the approach challenges criticisms associated with losing visual and interpersonal aspects of interaction. In this study, Skype enabled participants to remain in a familiar location with no physical intrusion or encroachment of personal space, whilst simultaneously conveying a sense of intimacy, contributing to the rapport of our conversations. Freely available internet software enabled recording of conversations with participants.

Face to Face

I conducted four face to face interviews, lasting from 40 – 100 minutes which I digitally recorded. Interview dates and times were arranged in advance with participants and took place in libraries and cafes connected to higher education institutions. The main advantage claimed of face to face interviews is that researchers are able to observe subtle indicators relating to the gestures and movements of the participants. This was entirely contrary to my experience as I realised post-interviews that although I noted initial visual observations, I had been totally absorbed and intent upon the narratives of my participants, listening carefully to their stories.

Telephone

Telephone interviewing proved a practical choice of interviewing as participants formed a national sample. A total of thirteen telephone interviews took place, lasting between 40 – 80 minutes that were digitally recorded. The obvious advantages of this approach are that it is relatively inexpensive because there is no travel; data can be gathered and summarized in a single location; interviews can take place with minimum disruption to participants (Gay et al., 2006).

I pre-arranged all telephone interviews at a time and date to suit participants. Although the protocol statement was presented in conversational language, I have to record that at the end of my introduction Charles joked 'Jesus, I feel as though I'm in a police station...are you going to charge me with something?'. The point I make here is that I believe the on-line website fostered a sense of a relationship and trust with my participants, challenging the critique that rapport during telephone interviews is difficult to achieve.

Using the telephone as a major data collection method meant that it was imperative I listened very carefully to what was being said, and what was not said, particularly in view of the lack of visual information. Interacting with participants in anonymous environments can result in the loss of many of the interactional qualities perceived to be taken for granted in face to face interviews and observations (Silverman, 2011). However, I agree with Holt (2010:115) who claims telephone interviews allow the

researcher to 'stay at the level of the text', avoiding the imposition of peripheral contextual information on the data.

Other Relevant Material

During the research period I have collected, where possible, newspaper articles and grey literature concerning the Armed Forces to provide a wider contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, which is the higher education experience of students from the British Army. This information reveals not only insights into military personnel but also illuminates the authors of such work as well as the time and context in which they were created.

Researcher's Field Notes

Memories, Denscombe (1998) points out, are selective and frail so it is important that researchers make notes throughout the study period to assist with contextual factors as well as the researcher's own growth (Bernard, 2006:396). Field notes, though, are constructed, interpreted and re-interpreted via various acts of reading and writing, subject to textual conventions and representations (Atkinson, 1992).

The most striking entry in my field notes relates to Wednesday 7th March 2012, when six British soldiers were killed in Afghanistan. The incident occurred during a week when I carried out three interviews and illustrates to me that no matter what label I assign to those involved with this research, participant, soldier or under-represented student, first and foremost this research is not concerned with data sets or units of analysis, but with 'real people' who undertake an unusual, potentially dangerous career.

Another prominent feature of my notes confirms the sense of difference that military personnel perceive. In my face to face meetings, I noted and later recorded my initial visual impressions of participants. In most cases, these personal details included a very smart and tidy appearance, a well-trimmed haircut, polished shoes and a respectful and humorous demeanour. These are not superficial incidentals; these are clear visual clues that point to the distinction of this group of students compared with those who may be thought of as 'traditional'.

3.4 Data quality procedures

Guidelines on the establishment of quality continue to be vigorously debated across and within disciplines and have become more prevalent as researchers move from a detached outsider position to that of integrated insider; from the researcher using a research instrument to the researcher being the instrument (McCracken, 1988). Agreement on criteria for assessing the quality of a qualitative study remains elusive with some scholars rejecting approaches that link positivistic terms of reliability, validity and generalisation with qualitative data. As my research emphasises the qualitative component I follow Lincoln and Guba (2003:329) who introduce the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as indicators of quality.

Credibility

The development of qualitative research and the critical and postmodern perspectives have challenged the dominant positivistic standards of reliability, validity, generalizability and objectivity that have traditionally been the standards by which the value of research has been judged (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). The postmodern influence suggests that no method can deliver an ultimate truth, questioning approaches that purport to do so (Lincoln and Guba, 2003).

Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose prolonged and persistent engagement with the community of interest as criteria for quality in qualitative research, I believe that the online website *enlist2enrol* afforded me opportunities to persist in my engagement with participants before and after interview procedures through the use of my Forum comments that were posted on a regular basis. Additionally, all participants were aware that they could contact me via email or office telephone at any time if they wanted to ask pertinent questions and I believe that this also contributed to a sense of engagement that they could utilise if they so wished. In this way, engagement was achieved without intruding unnecessarily upon participants.

Member checks also contribute to credibility and involve the researcher seeking verification with participants regarding the constructions that develop as a result of data collected and analysed. Cho and Trent (2006:324) refer to this concept as

'validity in qualitative research as an interactive process between the researcher, the researched, and the collected data that is aimed at achieving a relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences and values or beliefs collected and interpreted'. With regard to my research, member checks took place when the individual online survey responses were followed up by interviews. During this process, the credibility of the survey responses is affirmed and confirmed by the interview data.

A further consideration regarding credibility according to Mertens (2010) is progressive subjectivity. This involves an on-going monitoring of my own understanding of progress and change during the research procedure. Here, my journal notes captured my thoughts and feelings throughout the study period and provided me with a glimpse as to how my understandings of the research developed.

Transferability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) transferability is the qualitative parallel to external validity in postpositivist research. External validity enables a generalization of findings based on the assumption that the sample used in the study is representative of the population. Mertens (2010:259) claims that the 'burden' of transferability rests with the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context. It is my responsibility to provide extensive, careful and 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) enabling readers to comprehend the complexity of the research setting. In this research, I present an in-depth description of historical and contemporary representations of British Army personnel and provide a critique of higher education institutional practices. A table of pertinent demographic data is included at Appendix I.

Dependability

Dependability is identified by Guba and Lincoln (1989) as the qualitative parallel to reliability and in this research I endeavour to provide a dependable trail to attest to issues of quality and appropriateness. My research has not followed a predictable, linear route and it is therefore necessary that I describe the twists and turns as well as

the process and progression of my study investigating the experiences of British Army students in higher education.

Initially, this research began with a sharp focus on investigating the pastoral and academic challenges that military personnel may encounter at higher education. However, emerging themes in the data revealed that this was my preconceived focus and participants held their own views, comments and beliefs concerning what they wanted to speak about. Consequently, the focus of my research became more co-constructed with participants to acknowledge their contributions, changing the path of this study to include their educational biographies, affording a deeper, more nuanced examination of their experiences than I had originally intended.

Confirmability

Confirmability is identified as the qualitative parallel to objectivity, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989) and is provided in the form of a chain of evidence relative to the research process. In this Design and Methodology Chapter I provide a clear audit trail demonstrating how I carried out this research, illustrating that participants' stories and my understanding of them are not figments of my imagination (Mertens et al., 2010).

Transformative Criteria

Transformative researchers use methods that capture the lived experiences of those who are marginalised and therefore criteria are located in areas of social justice and human rights (Mertens, 2009). Although both qualitative and quantitative researchers have traditionally expressed concern for avoidance of bias based on gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability, in the transformative paradigm, bias related to these sources is explicitly recognised as a central tenet of research (Mertens, 2010).

3.5 Data management and analysis

The research questions of this study inform the procedures of data management and analysis that are integrally related. The questions are:

1. What are the educational autobiographies of a group of British Army personnel that have studied, or are studying in UK higher education?
2. What are the experiences of these British Army personnel within institutions of higher education?
3. What particular military and academic identities do these students possess and self-perceive?
4. How and to what extent do these identities intersect, collide and coalesce?

Data Management

The transparency of data organisation procedures and retrieval strengthens the quality of research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this study, data management commenced with initial codes assigned to the survey responses that identified demographic details and names of participants. Codes are labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential data produced during a study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Emerging themes from the survey responses were identified and compared for consistency or difference within and across interview transcripts. Data derived from interviews were coded according to source of information, and name of participant.

Two working copies were made of all data and a third copy was kept as a safeguard against potential loss. The first working copy of survey responses and interview transcripts were in paper format and were collated according to date of response or interview. Electronic copies of all data were also held by the researcher in specific folder locations.

Qualitative Data

Within this study there were three inter-related data sets comprising of the online survey responses, interview stories, and research notes. I personally transcribed interview transcripts as soon as possible post-interview, reading them many, many times to become familiar with participants' stories, identifying sections relating to their educational autobiographies and perceptions of what it is to be a student in

higher education. A more in-depth examination followed, using hand coding techniques of pens, highlighters and occasionally scissors to draw out similarities and differences between and within relevant sections of autobiographical data.

Initially, I attempted to code the data by dichotomous opposites of military and academic influences, positive and negative opinions and social and academic categories. These groupings merged and overlapped to such an extent that any analysis was deeply unreliable. However, after a lengthy and protracted period of immersion and submergence in the stories of participants, my analysis became less unreliable and more solidly nuanced. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest manual coding may be tedious and whilst it was time consuming it was never boring. Being able to physically handle the data transcripts afforded me the opportunity to 'walk through the data', creating a personal connection with participants, enabling me to read their comments, whilst remembering the context of our conversations. Due to the volume of data, the complexity of the phenomenon, and the messiness of qualitative research, analysis was a lengthy and time consuming practice that spread over a year. During this time, themes were revised, amended and rejected as my interaction and understanding of the data developed.

During these iterative processes, I aimed to keep an open mind and endeavoured to resist imposing predetermined categories (Prosser, 2000) instead allowing the data to 'speak for itself'. The codes generated initial clusters of descriptive experiences that were later rejected if the cluster represented the same phenomenon under a different heading (Trigwell, 2000). Transcripts were constantly referred to and compared until distinct themes emerged that encapsulated the educational experiences British Army students.

I employed inductive coding and the constant comparative method as procedural tools for analysing my qualitative data. Simply, inductive reasoning is based on the belief that the study of a number of individual cases leads to generalisation. The constant comparative method combines the principles of inductive coding whilst simultaneously comparing these with other events and social incidents that have been coded. This enables social phenomena to be compared across categories, giving

rise to new dimensions (Cohen et al., 2000). A crucial turning point in coding emerged when, returning to the survey responses of participants I realised, in an epiphany moment, that the majority of interviewees left compulsory schooling as soon as legally possible without educational qualifications.

Throughout the research procedure I engaged with relevant theoretical literature to enhance my understanding of the subject area and during the later stages of analysis I referred back to the research questions to see if the data answered these. The processes of engaging with theory, data analysis and answering the research questions formed important research components.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Sanctuary and Salvation

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I report the findings aligned to the first purpose of this investigation that is:

- To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students in UK higher education that have served, or are still serving, in the British Army

I focus on the two research questions:

- What are the educational autobiographies of a group of British Army personnel that have studied, or are studying in higher education?
- What are the higher educational experiences of this group of students?

Over the past eighteen months I have closely studied and read the stories of participants over and over again; not just paying attention to the written texts, but also to the hidden aspects of ambiguity, inconsistency and timbre contained within the words themselves. I have coded and themed the interviews and survey data on many occasions, paying careful attention to the voices of participants, reflecting on what they represent and how they are intertwined.

Being aware of my own place within the study has helped me to reject the notion of a dispassionate researcher and instead draw attention to the researcher bias that exists by having a familial background and learning career not dissimilar to those I have interviewed. To a limited degree, I have walked the same path as my participants and heeding my own situation and role within this research has helped me to identify a key aim of my analysis, to ensure that the accounts of participants resonate clearly above my own.

The autobiographical approach I adopt privileges the power of the personal voice of participants and elicits information that can expose the connections between a lived past and life as currently lived. However, autobiography can take many forms and can be subject to a mythologizing of what is deemed to be a 'true experience'. Rigoberta

Menchu's (1984) autobiographical account is a case in point, with the author facing a storm of criticism accusing her of a fabricated and inaccurate account. Defending her position, Menchu argued for authenticity as she had extrapolated the 'real' experiences of many Guatemalans as her own, claiming that the essence of her book was truthful. The ensuing controversy brought into sharp relief the idea that 'truth telling' is part of an individual's subjective experience and as such is inaccessible to another. Whilst it may not be possible to know, for certain the whole truth about the experiences of higher education students from the British Army, it is possible for beliefs to be justified when there is a tacit assumption of consent that warrants the belief, enabling a pathway to obtaining beliefs that are in all likelihood, true.

Following Geertz (1998), I draw attention to the complexity of attempting to convince readers that participants' experiences, autobiographies, their interpretation and representation by me as author are authentic and genuine without recourse to scientifically based assumptions. In this respect, I question the stability of those studies that make such claims, agreeing with Geertz (1998:24) that 'observational prose and literary innocence' should be unmasked, removing the artifice (Sandelowski, 1991) from the research process, thus allowing the focus of this study to be the experiences of students from the British Army.

By including narrative transcripts, survey responses and my own annotated field notes, I build upon participants' beliefs and generate a polyphonic representation of experiences, drawing also on a range of traditional and contemporary literary sources to extend the location of my research, providing deeper meaning. From this rich assemblage of data, I shed a ray of light upon the experiences of British Army students who currently inhabit the dark corners of higher education, often studying without validation of their experiences, undetected and hidden from view.

Through my analysis of these biographies the powerful significance of social class and class inequalities as experienced by participants is revealed in covert, complex and subtle ways that are injurious and damaging. Whilst I recognise other important intersections of gender, race and disability and how these may affect subjectivities, these are not the concerns of interviewees; instead, class is the core of their stories.

Significantly, and perhaps critically, 'class' is not explicitly named by participants but instead resides in nuanced shadows, subtly dominating almost every story told.

A disadvantaged socio-economic familial background is for me as the researcher, an unexpected, yet over-whelming theme of my analysis, graphically illustrated by the way in which the scars of a perilous childhood education can suppurate when participants are adults in higher education. Interviewees speak of enduring levels of sufferance as young people in compulsory schooling, who subsequently enlist into the military, a profession that potentially demands the ultimate sacrifice in protecting the realm. Such a finding is particularly profound and paradoxical when as members of the British Army, participants pledge an Oath of Allegiance to protect and serve the monarch and her subjects, effectively defending those whom they maintain, have caused injurious harm.

When reflecting upon their past lives, British Army students speak about 'escaping' from their hazardous compulsory schooling, and embrace a form of sanctuary and salvation by enlisting with the British Army, evoking a sense of the mythical 'noble savage' controversially attributed to Rousseau, whereby individuals are 'at one' with their environment, removed from the discursive nature of civilian life. Of course, enrolling with the British Army for reasons of shelter and solidarity is not the military's central aim, and it is important to recognise that within the military there are clear hierarchical divisions of, for example, Commissioned and Non-Commissioned Officers as well as subtle differences within ranks (Ware, 2012). But arguably what binds most military personnel is inculcation through uniform, ritual and army practices predicated upon core values that shape military identity and to which personnel adhere in varying degrees. A unified military culture forges a robust and enduring collective identity that is operationalized particularly consistently when on deployment (Coll et al., 2009) and is so embodied that when individual personnel return to civilian life, the essence of their soldierhood often remains tangible.

Veteran Derric Winters who returned to civilian life in 2009 after 16 months in Afghanistan notes that what he misses most from the military is not the professional practice of soldiering but the painful loss of camaraderie (Saslow, 2014). Such an

enduring sense of soldierhood is crucial to military effectiveness as well as protection against the ebb and flow of British public opinion towards the military, which in the past decade has brought the Military Covenant into public consciousness, detailing the uniqueness of military service and describing what personnel should expect in return for surrendering some of their civil liberties.

As adult students in higher education, participants bring with them their experiences of soldierhood and encounter a deep sense of unease that is borne from a conscious awareness of their military background and classed habitus that are incongruent with those of their contemporaries. Academic culture and socially dominant discourses of academic life situate middle class students as the traditional model (Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003) positioning students from the British Army within discourses of difference and marginalisation. The way in which higher education institutions operationalize practices and processes of exclusion is the final theme that emerges from participants' stories, suggesting that the specific socio-cultural attributes students from the British Army bring with them to higher education are of little importance to structures and actors within the experience of higher education.

The educational autobiographies that follow of Susan, Charles, Christopher, Jeremy, Josie and Jay frame this chapter, describing moments of their life experiences – life experiences filtered through the gaze of language, signs and processes of signification (Denzin, 1989:14). Following Bell (2003), I distinguish my annotated field notes from the main text to ensure the foregrounding of participants' stories. An exemplar quote precedes each of their biographical stories and this is intended to represent each participant's unique beliefs and experiences of being a higher education student who has served, or is serving, in the British Army.

4.2 Susan: "I wasn't as good as other people"

Susan, who is 33, lives in Wales and claims she 'always' wanted to join the military. Influenced by her father who also served in the British Army, she enrolled as a teenager to the Army Cadets. Obtaining Maths, English and French 'A' Levels, Susan was offered a place at university to study French and Spanish but at age 18, Susan was faced with financial difficulties and did not complete her studies. She then enlisted

with the British Army and served for a total of nine years in Germany, South East England and Northern Ireland ultimately reaching the rank of Corporal. Susan was selected for promotion to the rank of Sergeant but after her daughter was born she was posted abroad and struggled to combine her perceptions of being a 'good' mother with her military career which often meant working weekends and taking work home.

In 2010 Susan resumed her learning career. In order that she can continue working part time whilst looking after her daughter she is studying part-time for a Maths BSc with the Open University. Her current employment is 'quite dull and unsatisfying' (SR8) but her studies are stimulating and Susan hopes that these may lead to more interesting employment in the future. Her husband is a serving member of the British Army although she no longer accompanies him on postings.

I interview Susan early one evening at the beginning of February 2012 via the internet medium of Skype. When Susan and I make contact, I can immediately see a living room where Susan is seated on a beige settee scattered with cushions. There are pictures on the wall facing the video camera and the television is on in the background. Running around and waving to me in front of the video camera (and later dancing and posing for me to see her), is Susan's daughter, who is approximately five years old. The scene appears homely and warm; Susan speaks with a soft Welsh lilt and it takes a few minutes for me to adjust to her accent.

As an ice-breaker I ask Susan to tell me a little about herself and she begins with an unprompted brief description of her familial environment and how this intersects with her educational biography. Emerging from Susan's account is the significance of social class and the way in which socio-economic disadvantage permeates experiences and practices. She contrasts the British Army with a construction of herself as coming from a small, home town environment where post-compulsory education was unusual:

Before I joined the army I came from a really small town and small school, very few people took A-levels (IR3).

Expanding her narrative, Susan continues:

Going into the army, the way I grew up which was from a depressed welfare background I think I always grew up with a sort of chip on.....not a chip on my shoulder, but aware perhaps that I wasn't as good as other people and I couldn't do what other people did.... (IR4)

Susan's description of her working class background is coupled with a perception of inadequacy or of having less value when compared with other people. Her experiences and beliefs are therefore encapsulated by the exemplar quote "I wasn't as good as other people".

Emerging from Susan's somewhat embarrassed narrative is how difficult it is to pin-down and categorise social class. Rather than a definitive understanding, she provides a succinct description of 'a depressed welfare background', evoking a sense of the unemployment associated with the economic disadvantage of being working class. Yet, as Susan continues, social class is described not just in monetary terms but instead as an experience that is lived and fluid, something which is on-going rather than static and which concerns sensitivity to a wounding of feelings and emotions. Such an affective understanding of class assumes that individuals, in this particular case, Susan, can feel a sense of personal damage as a result of a disadvantaged socio-economic background. She conveys a sense of resentment, envy and anger towards her middle-class contemporaries who have more opportunities and are implicitly characterised by deference, superiority and envy. The tone of her comments indicates that class relationships are a one-way street, in which she is obliged to conform by deferential behaviour to the whims and wills of others. Importantly, Susan's narrative evokes the way in which class can play a prominent role at the beginning of the educational cycle, evoking a childhood experience tainted by stigmatised awareness.

Susan explains that the idea of going to university had been outside the realms of possibility and denotes a sense of oppression at being perceived as unsuitable or inappropriate for higher education:

She (the head-teacher) was the first person who ever said you know something like that, you know my family were quite surprised at the time.....university? That's

for people like Einstein or people with money you know, it wasn't ever on their agenda really but that set an aspiration for me and for them as well really. I think it took an outsider to say you are capable of this, you can, you know, people from your background can actually achieve things. (IR16)

Susan illustrates how a fleeting and intense encounter has a lasting and decisive effect on her life and can involve a process of self-discovery, culminating in a newly discovered feature – the potential to enrol at university – that she knew nothing of previously. In her survey response, Susan writes how 'her head-teacher planted a seed' of thought about higher education that leads to a transformation in her personal growth. This episode is highly meaningful to Susan and encourages her to enrol in higher education not once but twice, demonstrating her ability to draw on high levels of resilience necessary to overcome the socio-economic disadvantages she endured.

Her perception that university is a place for 'people like Einstein', or people 'with money' is shaped not only by her own experiences but also through the residual experiences of her parents and possibly even grandparents. These combine with her exposure to a working class habitus to reinforce her sense of early personal deficiency and difference. Susan articulates the way that her working class parents had access to low levels of material, cultural and social resources that enhance educational success. For Susan's parents, who were surprised at the thought of their daughter going to university, finance becomes a divisive tool of class that is used to validate and reinforce their notions of exclusion.

In our conversation Susan elaborates further how her background is firmly entrenched in her educational trajectory:

I think it's harder when you're from a certain background, when it's not expected, when you can't really get support from your family because it's nothing that they know anything about, they can't help with homework, they can't advise on GCSE choices or universities. It's really they don't know anything about it but also I think there is genuinely a feeling of inferiority you know, that you have a strong accent, and you don't speak very well and you don't sound posh or you don't sound clever or you don't wear the right you know....clothes or whatever. I think it's a general feeling of inferiority as well, that's what I experienced (IR7).

Susan's narrative conjures a bleak picture of her early school experiences and illustrates the way in which social signs and signifiers such as accent, dress,

appearance, preferences and lifestyles form sites of class struggle. Kuhn (1995) describes her own experiences of class from the perspective of a working class young woman who passes the 11+ examination that governs admissions to secondary school. Finding herself in an alien educational landscape, Kuhn (1995:98) explains class in a similar ontological vein to Susan, as something that breathes 'beneath clothes and under skin; that endures in reflexes, in the psyche, at the very core of being'. Susan's narrative describes how her experience of class and lack of resources cumulates in a sense of personal linguistic and internalised inadequacy. The early compulsory educational experience that Susan endures underpins a nuanced comprehension of social and intellectual superiority that pathologically positions her as 'inferior' within her educational trajectory.

Not being 'mature enough to organise my studying' (IR4) is the reason Susan explains her decision to leave the first university she attended, suggesting that it was her own 'fault' she left, illustrating the way in which working class higher education students internalise the pathology of deficit learner models and contrary to the way that other students from the middle class express strong notions of self-assurance and confidence in their studies (Crozier, Reay, Clayton et al., 2008). It is at this point, when Susan's initial university experience had been less than fruitful and she felt a sense of desertion by those who she maintains should have directed her studies adequately, that she seeks the sanctuary and salvation of the British Army.

Narratives of sanctuary and salvation may be ancient forms of stories but they can also be apposite in contemporary life narratives, illuminating how negative experiences can be transfigured into positive outcomes. The autobiographical approach I employ to this work affords the opportunity to understand and record how Susan's previous damaging encounters in education can be transformed into a thriving British Army career. Susan's narrative is illustrative of redemption; her initial injurious encounter at higher education is redeemed by her subsequent affirmative experience with the British Army.

Susan explains her perception of the way that discourses of disadvantage are perpetuated in the following extract:

I see the same patterns, I still have family living there and that way, and my nieces and nephews, I mean their chances just get narrower and narrower and I can see the difference that my daughter has, she will have much more opportunity than they ever will have really (IR17)

Although Susan's background is not from an affluent household, she has acquired embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) investing in self-improvement through learning with the Open University. Such capital comprises a personal individual resource for Susan that yields a form of psychological and social value, resulting in a change in her attitudes and behaviours, reflecting the new knowledge she has attained. Although as a young girl Susan believed she was not entitled to a university education the encouragement she received from her head teacher ignited an interest in higher education that has facilitated a fractured but flourishing learning career. Remarkably, Susan's narrative demonstrates her determination to carve a different educational trajectory from that which may have been expected of someone who explains her background as 'depressed welfare'. She has endeavoured and achieved the need to find a different life path that culminates in a form of personal transformation enabling her to foresee a future that promises 'much more opportunity' for her young daughter.

4.3 Charles: "They told me I was thick, stupid and lazy"

Charles entered the British Army in November 1983, aged 17 and served for 23 years. He initially joined the parachute regiment and then transferred to the medical corps where he reached the senior management rank of Warrant Officer 2 which is concerned with the training, welfare and discipline of a company, squadron or battery of up to 120 soldiers. Charles recalls Remembrance Day, 2005 as the last time he wore his military uniform and that his army record shows his length of service as 22 years, 247 days. During his army career, Charles took an NVQ Level 4 in Management and since leaving has gained his Certificate of Education from a northern university. Charles is now employed as a tutor in Adult Education.

My conversation with Charles is one of many that I have with participants that take place via the telephone. Throughout these conversations, it was imperative that I pay close attention to what, and how topics were articulated. We speak midweek on an afternoon and Charles, who works away from home during the week, is staying at a hotel. Charles' voice is confidently strong and he jokes and laughs throughout our talk, 'covering up' topics and thoughts that might otherwise be very sensitive. He mentions that 'the question always comes up.....have you killed someone?' and although laughing he follows this up swiftly by sombrelly acknowledging that when the question does arise 'it's a very uncomfortable moment as such'.

Charles' vocabulary is peppered with rich, expressive words and he implicitly suggests a sense of loss at having left the military. Describing his longstanding military career in a matter of minutes, he tells me 'so that's how 22 years whizzed by and then it was a case of here's the door mate, use it, don't let it kick your arse on the way out' (IR18). He voluntarily tells me his own opinion of those who he believes are responsible for sending him to war zones as 'lying gits' and 'bloody war criminals' (IR18).

There are two instances of cautionary nervousness in Charles' conversation with me that indicate he is well aware of the personal restrictions placed on him as a former serving soldier in the British Army. Halfway through our conversation when he is recounting his deployment, Charles jokes 'are you still recording this?' (IR10) and even though I tell him that I am indeed still recording, he nevertheless continues with his theme.

The second instance is at the start of his narrative, when Charles asks 'are you going to be asking anything about the military?' (IR1) because 'some of the things that, some of the units, some of the places I've served in and so forth have classifications on them' (IR2). When I reassuringly respond that this area is not the focus of my research, Charles illustrates how joining the British Army represents a form of sanctuary from the harsh pedagogic practices he experienced as a young boy:

The main reason I joined the army in the first place is because I wasn't very, academically gifted, I suppose the word is. I've always had this inkling that I'm not thick, but was never academically inclined. When I was at school and they called

me 'thick, stupid and lazy' actually it was them who was thick, stupid and lazy because they hadn't recognised the signs of dyslexia (IR5).

Charles recalls that 'my mum did, try to be fair, she did say to them I think there's something wrong with Charles' learning ability' (IR5) but the concept of dyslexia was not commonly recognised at the time. Charles' narrative exposes a powerful sense of being discursively different at an early age; that is, the power, control and knowledge generated by institutions such as education produce generalised forms of knowing that profoundly shape the meanings and understandings given to concepts such as 'thick, stupid and lazy'. Discursive practices that produce binary divisions such as 'bright, clever and hard-working' are constructed as normalising discourses that are binary opposites to 'thick, stupid and lazy' and therefore create divisive practices. Charles notes the unfairness and unequal treatment by 'them' suggesting a 'normalisation' of these cruel practices that combine to afford him with a strong sense of marginalisation from positive learning experiences. Yet, underscoring the narrative is the way in which Charles understands himself capable of withstanding profound suffering and stress suggesting maintenance of selfhood in the midst of quotidian trauma.

As a young child, Charles can do little but accept the way in which those who are educated have the authority and power (Delpit, 1988) to inflict demeaning judgement on others that can cause a crushing sense of inadequacy and inferiority, often resulting in academic stagnation. Delpit (2012:7) asserts that excuses for poor academic performance are often framed within a 'culture of poverty' (Payne, 2005) model that popularises deficit student thinking. In such a model, inspirational teaching becomes a form of patronizing, resulting in pedagogy of poverty, whereby individual teachers are responsible for particular types of students whilst the culturally oppressive nature of educational institutions continues. Indeed Delpit (2012) claims that what Payne (2005) labels 'culture' is actually the response to oppression, asserting that 'true culture supports its people: it doesn't destroy them' (2012:7).

The punitive, damaging language that rains upon Charles as a young boy is consistent with scenes from the 1969 motion-picture film, *Kes*, directed by Ken Loach and adapted from *A Kestrel for a Knave* written by Barry Hines. Set in a mining community

of South Yorkshire, the central character, Billy Casper, is a working class youth who against a background of poverty and drudgery, trains and forms a profound attachment to a young kestrel. Billy, like participant Charles, is constantly humiliated and punished by his educators, exposed to a continual torrent of the hidden repressive elements of pedagogic practice. In her own educational biography, Cambridge professor Diane Reay (2013:671) writes of similar painful experiences as a 'free school meal' pupil in the 1950s-1960s, and recalls how schooling became a 'battlefield' evoking feelings of dread as she faced ritual humiliation.

The disgust and contempt that Charles experienced at his early educational institution is synonymous with contemporary attitudes demonising (Jones, 2011) the working class and that have devolved into a deficient 'social type' whose disadvantage, it is suggested, might be as a result of their own actions, stressing the cultural and moral deficiencies of the working class surface in epithets such as 'chav', 'asbo' and 'pramface' (Bottero, 2009). In becoming a target of revulsion and disdain, Charles experiences a personal denigration to that of a social pariah attributed with little value or worth. Early education for Charles is a site of fear, struggle and anxiety that bruises him so badly that he is desperate to leave at the earliest possible opportunity. Compulsory school is where he endures everyday maltreatment. It is where Charles dutifully and resiliently 'passes-time', waiting until he can legally leave.

Escaping from a damaging education system into the sanctuary of the British Army resonates with the working class youth in Paul Willis' ethnography, *Learning to Labour* (Willis, 1993) who gleefully flee school in favour of the factory rather than continuing with higher education. Post compulsory educational choices were firmly rejected by the youths in Willis' study and also by Charles who, instead of crossing the factory gates, crossed the military line and sought refuge in the British Army, in effect carving out a space for personal recovery from his injurious early schooling.

The comment that he was not 'academically gifted', illustrates Charles' perception that this is a necessary requirement for post-compulsory education. 'Gifted' individuals are those who perform very well in ways that are socially valued, reflecting an inherent educational bias towards academic achievement at the expense of other

manual, bodily or dispositional skills. Reflecting on when he was a young boy, Charles remembers that he was not 'academically inclined' suggesting the gulf of difference between himself and other children who were more academically able. Yet, identifying who is 'gifted' is highly contestable as the term masks prevailing social inequalities concerned with ability and environment. Naturally bright children who lack a propitious environment may be over-looked as 'gifted' and a child that may have been exposed to middle class parental pressures and institutionalised forms of 'intelligence', measured by achievement in tests and exam scores, may be considered exceptional. In these ways it is possible for the advantageous socio-economic classes to invest and strategize, ensuring that their children retain a stronger possibility of academic accomplishment than children like Charles from the working class.

Charles' perceived lack of academic ability is cultivated and endorsed by those around him:

I remember every Monday morning as a youngster, feeling physically sick not wanting to go to school because they told me I was thick, stupid and lazy and that's something that's stuck in my head, thick, stupid and lazy (IR7)

Charles' fear of school is manifest ontologically by feeling physically unwell and consequently not wanting to attend. The privileged authority that is imbued within Charles' primary school educators, and those who determine the measure of Charles' intelligence and what is 'normalised' becomes an effective instrument of domination. Those who label and taunt Charles operationalize deep yet subtle acts that foster a 'culture of power' (Delpit, 1988) within educational institutions. Charles' schooldays are cloaked in the hidden fearfulness that arises from the knowledge that he does not have the 'right' to fully participate in his compulsory education and is instead subject to ridicule and humiliation.

Whilst pedagogical practices are more open to scrutiny since Charles' experience, educational institutions remain a fecund site for hidden fear to be cultivated and evidence suggests that the contemporary education system retains powerful remnants of past elite prejudices (Reay, 2006). Concealed fear that hides in the gaze of an expression, or indiscernible ways of being is more complex to identify and comprehend than gross obvious fears. Interestingly, Holt (1982) compares fearful

children like Charles to 'good soldiers'; that is those who control their fears, live with them and adjust themselves to them. Holt (1982:93) goes on to note a vital difference between school and war in that the adjustments children make to their fears are almost wholly destructive of their intelligence and capacity; the scared fighter may be the best fighter, but the scared learner is always a poor learner.

Yet, as an adult in higher education, Charles is no longer a poor learner because 'now I've got a bit of paper that says I'm dyslexic' (IR5) which is 'a massive advantage' (IR12) so 'if I set my sights on doing something I'll do my dandiest to get to where I want to be, that is achieving and actually doing it to the best of my ability' (IR8). Despite Charles' negative experience at compulsory schooling, as an adult he demonstrates a profound hardiness and determination that manifests in a quest for academic and personal accomplishment. Research that investigates childhood compulsory schooling may help to illuminate the perpetration of inequalities, yet little is known regarding the factors that contribute towards the return of these children as adults to higher education. Whilst Charles imbues adult confidence, he imparts a visceral, sense of anger and injustice directed towards his early educational experiences and evokes the way in which he has embodied a deep sense of class conflict as a consequence of the hegemonic discursive practices inflicted upon him as a young boy:

Well I was, you know, we had a school reunion last year and I was going to take my Level 5 in Management and my Cert Ed with me and I was going to be inserting them into someone's orifice (laughs) but they weren't there (IR7)

The narrative of Charles now opens a new space for an alternative ending to his story that is marginalised by dominant narratives of oppression. Charles has (re)sorted the events of his story to create a different ending, for as Sandelowski (1991) notes, a story once told can become something else in another telling. Bandaged in British Army banter, Charles' alternative ending demonstrates both resilience and redemption, affording a sense of agency, control and change over his life events.

4.4 Christopher: "I'm an ex-squaddie and a thick Yorkshire man"

Christopher left school with 'O' level art and considered going to Art College but was influenced to join the British Army by his mother, who 'loved the military' and his brother who had joined the regular army previously. Christopher served at home and

abroad in Germany for over seven years and became a technician with the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers (REME), a unit that oversees the repair and maintenance of equipment within the British Army. After leaving the army, Christopher joined a building construction site but then suffered a back injury and became unemployed for six months. Christopher eventually found work installing televisions but his back injury resurfaced and he was unemployed again for nearly a year. Whilst unemployed, Christopher considered studying for a degree to enable him to pursue wider career options and despite financial hardship began an Access to higher education course that he really enjoyed. Following this, Christopher applied to study at a northern university and enrolled on a Humanities degree course programme. Christopher graduated with a 1st Class Honours degree in 2006 and commenced an MSc which he failed to complete due to financial hardship.

I meet Christopher late one Monday afternoon in February at a small café within the campus of the higher education institution where he studied. Christopher's demeanour is one of wistfulness and slight reserve. Early in our conversation he makes it clear that he has had difficulty finding employment and has worked sporadically 'here and there' and although he doesn't regret his higher education experience he tells me that, 'if I had my time all over again I would do things differently'. At times during our conversation it seems to me that Christopher is uncomfortable and I find myself asking him several times to elaborate on what he is saying. When I later reflect on our conversation, it occurs to me that Christopher's unease is possible because our conversation takes place in the higher education institution where he previously studied and a more neutral setting may have been more appropriate.

Christopher's class background is evident at the beginning of his narrative and draws attention to the way he seeks the sanctuary of the British Army as soon as possible after he leaves compulsory school; aided by his mother's affection for the Armed Forces and the fact that his brother is also serving:

I come from a rough area on a housing estate in Barnsley and I didn't know much about education so I didn't have many choices when I left school. I didn't do so well at school so deciding to join education wasn't the direction I was given. I left school as soon as I could really (IR3).

Compelled to leave compulsory education as soon as possible, Christopher is a refugee of class until he enlists in the British Army where the military institution becomes a surrogate family and 'home from home'; where working class characteristics of 'rough' and 'tough', undesirable in educational settings, are guiding principles for serving soldiers.

Fleeing a perilous education system is evident not only in Christopher's narrative but also in the stories of Charles and Susan. Political commentator Owen Jones records a lack of post-educational possibilities for disadvantaged young people in *Chavs: The demonization of the working class* (Jones, 2011). When asking a participant about potential employment following pit closure in North East England, Jones (2011:186) is told, 'There's nothing! There's *nothing*! My son's twenty four now and he joined the army because there was *nothing*'. Whilst some personnel may enlist as a result of a lack of educational choices and employment prospects, the experiences of participants suggest they exhibited a strong propensity towards joining the British Army at a young age by enrolling in the army cadets, or as in Christopher's narrative, a familial 'love' of the military.

Christopher's narrative continues by comparing his experiences as a soldier of the British Army and as a student in higher education:

I remember I was frightened to death when I started the Access course, here I was, a roughie toughie soldier and I was starting re-education and starting something I hadn't done for twenty odd years and I remember one of the tutors on the course, she said 'you look like a rabbit caught in headlights'. I kept thinking to myself I shouldn't be doing this and you doubt yourself. I don't know if it's just people from the army but it's just the way I felt at the time, frightened because it was totally different to what I knew (IR9).

Encapsulated in Christopher's testimony is the dissonance of fit between a working class habitus, a military career and being a student in higher education that combine to produce fright. Such emotions are evident in Reay's (2013:672) personal account of being a working class university student, noting that she was 'plunged into a middle

class world that was even more alienating than my school experiences had been', eventually leaving with a 'strong sense of being bruised and battered by the whole experience'. The estrangement that a working class heritage can bestow upon academics working in higher education is illustrated by Ryan and Sackrey's (1996) *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* and Dews and Law's (1995) *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*. Contributors to these two autobiographical accounts describe the acute and often painful dislocation they experience in deferring to the privileged values of higher education whilst obscuring their working class upbringings, creating a fissure that fosters a borderline state, the sense of 'being neither here nor there' as the working class academic can never fully 'move in' (Cappello, 1995:130).

Christopher's narrative augments these established themes of alienation, as he becomes a 'stranger' within a class based higher education system that disadvantages the working class. The tutor's metaphor of a 'rabbit caught in headlights' visually captures the way other individuals perceived Christopher's experience at higher education and he draws on the word 'frightened' to describe his feelings at the unfamiliarity of academic discourse. As a student from the working class, it is probable that Christopher had little or no access to foreign travel, classical and contemporary art, dance and theatre, fine cuisine, elegant clothes, middle class manners or influential people. It is most likely that before he went to university, no-one else in his family had sat in a lecture hall or explained to him how to communicate to professors, how to dig out obscure information in the library and which journal articles would be appropriate to read (Overall, 1995). Participating in higher education is an unfamiliar, unsatisfactory experience for Christopher, far removed from the sanctuary and validation that being a member of the British Army affords.

Robb (2002) who investigates British military culture and Barker's (2008) novelistic World War I trilogy, *Regeneration* describe the class distinctions of the home front as being reinforced in the military. Similarly, in an ethnographic account of the lives of soldiers in the British Army, Hockey (1986) also observes that the British Army structure resembles the entrenched divisions between the estates – nobility and commoners - of medieval Europe. For Christopher, and other participants, escaping

education and enlisting in the British Army enables a sense of continuity and familiarity of their classed backgrounds. A significant difference between the divisions of the military and the class divisions of society as a whole is that the hierarchy of the military is not imperceptible; it is evident who is subordinate to whom.

In contrast to contemporary understandings of class claiming that the working class have largely been eviscerated as a visible presence (Savage, 2003), the hierarchy of the military clearly illustrates who is subordinate to whom by cultural symbols of rank, uniform and privilege. Everyone *knows* their place; knows what is expected of them and knows what is required of them to maintain the status quo. Significantly, it is this visible acceptance of rank within the ethos of the British Army that is in sharp contradistinction to the culture of higher education that casts a heavy veil over notions of class and difference, unaware of the injurious effects of rejection by invisibility.

Whilst there are distinctions between students from the British Army and other under-represented students, there are great similarities in the way that (in)visibility is negotiated. Butler (1990; 1993) describes this in Queer theory, the premise of which broadly problematizes essentializing concepts of identity that exclude those who fail to conform to hegemonic normalcy. In Butler's view, performative anti-assimilationist techniques of parody, pastiche and 'flaunting' draw attention to exclusionary practices and are a visible form of cultural defiance, often interpreted as 'rebellious' or 'deviant'. As a marginalised student population, scholars from the British Army experience the same exclusionary practices that apply to other minority groups, raising the issue of how and to what extent they can become embodied higher education students, and what they *have to do* to belong.

Hoggart (1966:239) draws attention to the dissonance that can exist in higher education in his influential cultural account *The Uses of Literacy* that describes what it was to be a northern working class university student in the 1960s. He notes that 'almost every working class boy who goes through further education finds himself chafing against his environment during adolescence. He is at the friction point of two

cultures'. A similar cultural chaffing arises in the context of the relationship between Christopher and his fellow peers; being a military student who also shares a working class heritage at higher education becomes a wounding experience:

A lot of the time I felt intimidated because I felt as though I wasn't good enough. I know that's just a personal thing but I felt that they were intelligent and I wasn't even though my marks were fair enough. I always felt as though I couldn't verbalise what I wanted to say. Typical Yorkshire man, thick (IR12).

Christopher's description of being 'not good enough' clearly indicates a sense of 'difference' from the dominant culture of higher education that is swathed in the reproduction of middle class privilege that dominates processes of authority, entitlement and standards whilst simultaneously stifling any form of working class advantage. Perceiving other students to be more intelligent or knowledgeable also prompts a sense of 'intimidation' for Christopher. The consequences of such fear are significant and disabling as they result in a sense of defeat that can affect Christopher's experience in terms of class participation and student socialisation. As a higher education student, bound and tied by such damaging perceptions, Charles' own sense of self-efficacy, integrity and self-confidence are undermined routinely, in effect creating a 'normalising' experience, subtly obscuring the documentation of class as it is experienced.

Orwell (1989:133) gives an account of his perception of soldiers in *The Road to Wigan Pier*; he writes that 'when I was not much past twenty I was attached for a short time to a British regiment. Of course I admired and liked the private soldiers as any youth of twenty would admire and like hefty, cheery youths five years older than himself with the medals of the Great War on their chests. And yet, after all, they faintly repelled me; they were 'common people' and I did not care to be too close to them'. Christopher's autobiography hints at this understanding in the following extract with an understanding of his past, that of a being 'just an ex-squaddie' the implicit assumption being that 'an ex-squaddie' is not 'good enough' when compared to his peers at higher education:

You know the kids on the course were very intelligent and it's just so intimidating – I'm just an ex-squaddie (IR17)

Christopher's experience in higher education is a mirror image of his earlier encounters as a young schoolboy. Indeed, the experience he describes as a student has deep continuities with his compulsory schooling in that university is a perilous place fraught with jeopardy; a place far from home where the legacy of a working class upbringing is a feeling of not being good enough or smart enough to succeed in middle class academia (Overall, 1995). Yet, Christopher's story is remarkable in the way that he exercises considerable personal resource and resilience by achieving a 1st class Honours degree, despite experiences of alienation in his university environment.

4.5 Jeremy: "There's them like people, then me"

When I connect to Jeremy via Skype I am very pleased; this is our third attempt at trying to have a conversation. On our first arrangement Jeremy forgot our appointment and on the second he over-slept as he had watched the American Super Bowl into the early hours of the proposed interview morning. I can see Jeremy's room at university; there are posters on the wall. Jeremy appears gregarious, congenial and relaxed in front of the video camera, smiling broadly; his enthusiasm and willing participation in the research is evident by the comments and questions he asks. During the course of our interview there is a brief pause whilst he answers a knock on his door.

Over a year has passed since our conversation when Jeremy contacts me via email to ask how the research is progressing and to happily tell me that he gained a 2:1 degree; he has accepted an offer of an MA at a northern university and begins his course in October 2013.

Jeremy attended a local comprehensive school and achieved ABB 'A' levels. He recalls the exact date he applied to join the Territorial Army as being the day after his 18th birthday and the day he pledged his Oath of Allegiance. Jeremy joined the T.A. in order to acquire leadership skills, an insight into the larger world and to have a steady income. He was in the T.A. for two years during which time he completed his basic and officer training. He left after voluntarily disclosing previous minor drug use.

Jeremy's first experience of university was as a student in London; he completed the first year but then left. He transferred to another university in the North of England and is now a settled, full-time second year student studying full-time for a B.A. in

politics. His modules include International Relations, Security, the European Union, Peace Studies and Development. A key influence in Jeremy's life has been his father who 'left school at 14 and is a builder' (IR12). His father encouraged him to attend university and inspired Jeremy to continue with his studies when he thought about leaving.

My dad told me, people who leave university at twenty-one earn more than I do at forty. Be one of those twenty-one year olds with a nice car, who I hate! So he's pushed me towards academia and stuff. When I first went I hated it and when I thought about dropping out and re-starting somewhere else in the first year he said just finish the first year and then re-start and that was what I did really. He's been a big influence certainly (IR12)

Jeremy explains that in the army, 'they recognise when they screw up and recognise when you do really well' (IR2) but goes on to say that at his first university 'I wasn't getting that, I wasn't getting the same amount of support' (IR2). Whilst there is no simple blueprint for student success, there are factors that may enhance rates of retention by students from under-represented groups and, to some extent, achievement in higher education is partly attributable to the way in which practices and policies are operationalized. In identifying a lack of support, Jeremy expresses an understanding of the inequalities that impeded his first experience of university.

Why Jeremy was unsuccessful in his first entry to higher education is a deeply complex issue that may involve a range of interconnected factors. However, a prominent area of research suggests that until the different characteristics and needs of the increasingly diverse student population are examined, higher education institutions will fail to provide adequate provision that facilitates a thriving environment for all students. Such provision embraces a curriculum that is free from the bias of middle class advantage and promotes an interactive pedagogy based on respect and understanding of the diversity of students. Clearly Jeremy's experience is incongruent with the classed culture of his university, resulting in a lack of 'fit' with his higher education institution. Consequently, students similar to Jeremy, whose needs are not met, leave university without completion of their studies. This raises a critical issue for my research and indicates a crucial area about which little is known at present; how many higher education students that have served, or are serving with

the British Army, fail to reach their full academic potential and achievement goals, exiting prematurely from their studies?

Attending university has not been a natural motivation for Jeremy, who comments that he was 'pushed' towards academia suggesting reluctance and a process of negotiation rather than the anticipated and predictable trajectory that is the domain of privileged students. Speaking of his experience in the army and comparing this to his time at university, Jeremy continues:

In the army, you dug deep and did your bit. At university, I didn't see that, like in the army everyone is together pretty much, Officers are separate slightly to the lower ranks but as an Officer Cadet you've got to dig in, you've got to be the best of Privates to justify doing this whereas at university there was two worlds (IR2).

The above narrative initially describes how Jeremy had a perception of 'being all together' in the army that he did not experience in university. Jeremy describes the university in terms of 'two worlds' suggesting an encounter of profound conflict, distinguishing between 'the real world' and that of 'academia', visualized by a stark fault line; an experience LaPaglia (1995:177) describes from the standpoint of being a working class academic, as looking in 'two-directions, awkwardly'. Jeremy's description reveals how the interests of the working class to which he belongs are inimical and culturally antagonistic with those of the academy.

Jeremy continues his narrative with a more descriptive account of what he means by 'two worlds':

There's them like people sitting with i-pads and kindles, all the text books in front of them and then there's people like me, fighting for a free copy of the same book along with all the other students in the library and it was a very different existence (IR2).

In the above, Jeremy vividly articulates his experience of the inter-relatedness between education and wider social contexts. Those who have access to modern technological resources and equipment are seen as being in conflict with students from Jeremy's background who have to compete for limited shared resources. The narrative illustrates how class inequalities exist and persist as middle class families are more able to strategize and transform their resources to enhance their children's educational achievement. What is of importance here is exploring how such scarcity

is initially shaped and developed as these exclusionary practices cultivate a human landscape peppered with students like 'them' and students 'like' Jeremy who experiences a form of covert marginalisation. Charlesworth's (2000) autobiography of the personal consequences of class and the effects of growing up as part of a stigmatised group recalls his own tortuous experience as a student at a prestigious higher education institution. He notes that 'the homogeneity of elite educational institutions establishes conditions for the most ruthless forms of discrimination that I've ever seen' (2000:x). The participants in my study did not all attend the elite institutions that Charlesworth (2000) comments upon, but they speak directly of levels of discrimination experienced at a range of higher education institutions.

When I ask Jeremy about his current experience at a northern university he tells me that he is 'really enjoying it' but comments that:

(The university) is a really good university but it hasn't.....but it's only been around for 50 years so it's still up-coming. It's a bit like the army, everyone is doing their little bit to make it that little bit better because when you say to people the University of Lancaster, people say 'where's that?' Is it in the Top 30 or Top 10 and then they go, 'Oh ok'. You know it's like that feeling about being in the army 'that must be fun for you' (IR3).

Jeremy's comments reveal his perceptions of the differences that exist between higher education institutions. Stratification processes are evident in the promotional strategies of elite UK universities that trade on their exclusivity and foster images that foreground tradition, esteem and academic distinction (Reay, David and Ball 2005). In contrast, many of the new universities promote themselves as accessible, with widened appeal, and emphasis on aspects of university life as much, if not more than academically the student's individual experiences. In a study that addresses growing inequalities in higher education, Reay, David and Ball (2005) note that students confront very differing degrees of choice that are significantly shaped by social class and the perceptions that individuals will find universities that 'fit' with their own social and cultural images of themselves.

That students seek specific universities at which they may feel 'at home' in contrast to those in which they do not, evokes the disappearance of the drivers of change in higher education institutions of the 1960s-1980s designed to expand educational

possibilities. The dynamic visions of the Robbins Report, Widening Participation and the relatively recent Equality Act have arguably resulted in a 21st century atomisation of student experience, a static pathology in which under-represented students masquerade as caricatures of a defined 'type' or stereotypical models.

Superficially operationalizing inclusion, higher education institutions frequently reject notions of differences within recognised student populations, as to do otherwise would create myriad challenges to orthodox pedagogical practices. The resources – time, human and cultural – to create a more relational approach to teaching predicated upon the sociocultural nature of learning and teaching would possibly demand a complex and often institutionally impossible response, one that studies demonstrate is desirable to students but structurally difficult to realise (Mello, 2004). Such an approach would draw on students' backgrounds, identities, interests and cultural knowledge, assisting them to develop a flourishing learning approach that encompasses cognitive and social dimensions (Foster, Lewis and Onafowora, 2003). Yet, in denying that differences exist, a disjoint erupts between individual ideals and the possible potential of academic flourishing. Evident from the narratives I have collected in this work is the loss of educational possibility for students from the British Army as university is differentially endured rather than celebrated, enjoyed or developed upon.

4.6 Josie: "We don't really want you here"

Josie joined the Territorial Army in 1989 when she was a student nurse. After she completed her nurse and midwifery training she joined the regular army in 1992 as a Nursing Officer. Her inspiration to serve occurred during the Falklands conflict when she saw nurses wearing red-cross armbands standing on one of the ships being deployed to the island. Following basic training, Josie was posted for three years to the British Military Hospital in Germany working as a midwife providing maternity care to soldier's wives. She was then seconded to work with the Royal Navy as a midwife at The Royal Naval Hospital, Gibraltar. Two years later, Josie was in England at another Royal Military Hospital working on a medical evacuation ward.

She was then posted to a Military hospital in northern England and experienced operational tours to Bosnia and Kosovo. Following these deployments, Josie left the regular army, joined the territorials and enrolled at university. In addition to serving weekends and evenings with the T.A., and working as a midwife at a local hospital, Josie completed a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management, and achieved a degree in Law. Josie's interest in studying has led to an academic career as a university midwifery lecturer and she has just completed her PhD in Health Studies. Josie is still involved with the T.A.

Josie's responses to the on-line survey alert me to the many varied occupations within the British Army and the way in which personnel can switch from one service to another during their careers. Josie is an engaging participant, speaking eloquently and at length. At the end of our conversation that lasts almost an hour and a half, she asks to have more information outlining my research as she has contacts who may be interested in participating.

Josie 'did not shine academically at school' (SR5) and her perception of education is that it 'is a privilege, not a right, it's a privilege and we've forgotten that' (IR5) indicating that her experience of education is viewed through the lens of perceived privilege. Rocco and West (1998:171) claim that privilege is a social construction representing the advantage one person has over another, manifesting within the field of education in tacit forms of power, access, status, credibility and normality. A psychosocial perspective of privilege is concerned with the internalised uncritical acceptance of assumptions in which the dominant culture indoctrinates its members with feelings of adequacy and superiority whilst marginalising other groups with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority – thus shaping tacit knowledge that informs actions. When individuals experience the world through the lens of privilege a particular picture emerges that is shaped by the dominant discourse, reproducing existing power structures. Josie's sense of privilege arguably relates to her view that education is available to segments of society denied to those without privilege

indicating an awareness of cultural privileges and disadvantages. Those that belong to the higher education culture of privilege often fail to recognise that others are marginalised, lacking access to their world.

Although Josie's experience of higher education 'was very enjoyable and she loved learning' (SR₃) she comments that:

In nursing you write very succinctly, you have a specific way of writing and you write your patient notes, very short and sharp and then in academia you have to write your waffly words but in the army you've got to write very to the point so service writing is an art within itself and its well, why do I have to put the waffly stuff in when at the end of the day I can say it in 10 words rather than 100? (IR₉)

Academic literacy practices require complex decoding of tacit understandings and conventions that often remain mysterious to those who have not had access to academic capitals, networks and subjectivities. Students similar to Josie who are unfamiliar with this practice are often misrecognised as intellectually inferior, 'weak' or lacking ability. The ability to write in particular ways is misunderstood as a natural capacity rather than a social practice learned over time through access to certain resources, networks epistemologies and educational provision (Burke, 2012:193). Assessing her experience of higher education, Josie describes how her 'focus on assignments' assisted in 'taking her mind off warfare' (IR₂). She recalls, 'I used to have European Law lectures on Wednesday morning and then on the Tuesday night beforehand I had been doing rifle practice at my T.A. centre'(IR₂).

Josie identifies that 'there is nowhere on the UCAS form to say whether a person has a military background – nothing to flag that up' (IR₁₁) indicating the lack of validation that students from the British Army experience. Without such validation, the stories and identities of Josie and other participants in this study remain insignificant, lacking contextualisation within other groups of under-represented students:

Other minority students are like those with disabilities, but not the military. I think there is a feeling here of 'oh we don't really want you here because we know you're going to be an alcoholic, homeless and end up in prison, and if you're a woman, you must be a lesbian as well'(IR₁₁)

There are two main threads to Josie's extract above; the first of which is that army personnel are an invisible group at higher education who are, in effect, discriminated

against, despite the emergence in the latter half of the last century of new social movements that represent women, Black and ethnic groups, lesbians and disabled people. More recent movements include students that have been in care and have dependent children and resultantly, higher education institutions can no longer view students as abstracted from the context of their background or as 'ideal' individuals who conform to a clearly drawn 'standard' of studenthood. Yet, British Army students remain an imperceptible, muted group at higher education whose background is ignored and irrelevant; they are denied the opportunity of being fully active and valued participants in university communities.

Such an institutional attitude towards students from the British Army is against the letter of mooted government concerns with providing more protection against the very experiences of military discrimination that Josie describes. The proposals argue that offences demonstrating 'hostility' to service personnel or their families should be treated as 'aggravated' as is already the case for hostility towards individuals with protected characteristics such as sexual orientation or disability (Hopkins, 2012).

A key challenge of analysing the inclusion of students that have served in the military is that they do not constitute a common analytical category; instead, they intersect with groupings of mature students and exhibit vulnerabilities common to many overlapping groups of people. The crucial difficulty with this framework is that such an implication suggests that all mature students share the same social background and ignores the different worldviews, needs and interests that students who have served in the British Army carry with them into higher education. I claim that military students live in the dark shadows of higher education and represent a student population undetected and hidden from view; they are in effect, students in camouflage.

The second thread of Josie's narrative reflects her perception of the pathology military personnel encounter that discursively constructs them as deviants. Within the context of higher education, Josie comments that military personnel are 'not really wanted' suggesting a sense of being matter out of place (Douglas, 2005), excluded

from higher education institutions instead of being identified and protected as Dannatt (2010) advocates.

Josie suggests that her encounter with higher education could have been enhanced if:

We were given a choice so that we can decide for ourselves about what we want to do, be it meet other military personnel or not, and to just make people aware say, if any of you are military, we do have, you know, a student rep or someone like that, just have someone who is a military person so if you want to go to them, have a coffee with them or have a military group where we can talk about our shared experiences, just so that there is a military focal point you can go and get together. I think traditionally universities are left wing and anti-military people (IR13)

In this extract, Josie conceptualises the lack of conscious inclusion of military students at higher education institutions and highlights the inseparability of being a student and having a military background.

In her closing comments to me, Josie returns to her earlier remarks about under-represented groups and her perception that higher education institutions turn a blind eye to army personnel:

I think universities have a veil over the whole military thing – they just think that military people are going to cost them a whole lot of money and they're not. They're actually motivated individuals who really want to talk about their life experiences. Some people won't, you know, just treat us as normal – we aren't different beings, we just have different life experiences, very unique life experiences, really (IR14).

4.7 Jay: "I can be like them if I try hard"

At age 18, Jay joined the Royal Corps of Signals, British Army that is involved with electronic warfare, information technology and communications. The Corps motto is 'Certo Cito' which loosely translated means 'Swift and Sure'. Jay served for 23 months but was injured during field training and spent three months in rehabilitation. Jay's health problem was mis-diagnosed and as a consequence he sustained a further injury when he returned to duty, resulting in two surgical operations, spending six months on crutches and nine months in physiotherapy and rehabilitation. Jay was granted a medical discharge.

Jay successfully completed an Access course designed for students whose school leaving qualifications do not meet admission requirements for direct entry to an

undergraduate programme. Jay's Access year provided him with a guaranteed entry route to an undergraduate course within a social science degree programme. Jay has a young son and because of limited housing options, lives with his ex-girlfriend.

I meet with Jay twice; the first meeting was arranged so that I could explain and describe my research and the second takes place in a private room at the university Jay is currently attending. Despite our previous meeting, Jay is somewhat nervous at the beginning of our interview and his voice shakes a little when he initially speaks, but visibly settles down after the first few questions.

At primary school, Jay 'was top of the class all the way through' but when he went to secondary school he had 'a health problem that meant I couldn't walk for six months so I missed my first year' (IR2). Jay's parents 'split up and after that education was just a nightmare. I got in with the wrong crowd and ended up drinking on the streets and stuff like that and I didn't really bother with school or that. I mean I went but I didn't take much notice of anything, I was more interested in girls than the teaching' (IR2).

For Jay, going to university is a potentially transformative experience linked to the perception that he can 'be like them' if he works hard:

I want more from life and a better environment for my son to grow up in. Since leaving the army I got stuck in dead-end jobs working ridiculous hours for little gain. I worked for people who had degrees and good jobs and a better lifestyle and I decided I have the ability and drive to be like them if I try hard' (SR8)

As a student from a working class background, Jay aspires to improve his circumstances by gaining an education/qualification which he hopes will lead to a better way of life, perceiving that another world exists which is not part of his own social heritage and from which he is currently excluded. Although the higher education environment is unfamiliar to Jay, he expresses a self-awareness that is committed to self-improvement, generating change and transformation, indicating the ways in which the habitus can be continually modified by experience.

However, commenting on his degree programme, Jay notes that 'being a mature student at 30 is difficult' (SR₄) and explains that:

My personal circumstances have got a lot worse since my Access year and one of the major drawbacks is that they are all 19 year old kids, you know what I mean and because I'm a living out student I'm not in the clique so the mature students are quite set apart really. We've all got our own things to do and we don't socialise like the kids do, we haven't got that group thing like they have. It's difficult because I can't relate to them but I'm trying to steer through it, through the lessons and keep away from them (IR₄)

I ask Jay if this is a deliberate decision that he has made; to keep a distance from the younger students and he responds:

Oh yes, I've made it definitely. I might talk to a few of them but like I say we're just not in the same group. It's more a passing thing if we have to do group work with them, well then we have to, but its torture (IR₄)

The army background that Jay described to me 'just doesn't come up' with fellow students and so 'only a few of my close friends know' (IR₆). In lectures, Jay sits 'near the people I feel comfortable with or mainly on my own if I can get away with it' (IR₇). He says that:

I do take notes if I can get the grasp of what they're saying otherwise I'll just try and pay attention to what they're saying and then sum it up at the end if I possibly can otherwise I just let it sink in, just sit there and let it sink in and look at it later if I possibly can and see if I can make sense of it all (IR₇)

For Jay, 'assignments are the hardest thing because of all the take home work and that's one of the things I really struggle with.....I really struggle with getting anything done once I leave the university because of the home situation (IR₇). Jay equates his lack of time as poor time management, emplacing the issue as his 'struggle' and his inability to adapt to the institution and its rules, rather than for the institution to adapt to the situational context that students bring with them. He tries to 'find some time in the library two or three times a week but to be honest some of the stuff is really difficult you know what I mean?' (IR₇). Expanding on this, Jay continues:

Most of the readings are so long they put me to sleep and I actually find myself asleep in the library. It's not ideal but my brain just goes off on a tangent sometimes like I read something and I think ahh yea.....got it.....then I read the

next chapter and I'll still be thinking about what I read in the first chapter and it doesn't sink in. I do try and do the reading' (IR7).

Mann (2008:75) claims the 'white middle class' norm still predominates at UK higher education as does the profile of traditional students as direct entry from school with appropriate 'A' levels or Scottish Highers. Common to many under-represented students, Jay only restarted his studies within the preceding twelve months. In a study investigating widening participation and non-traditional entrants to higher education, Bowl (2003) notes that the difficulties experienced by students included issues of time management, reading and assignment writing as well as the way in which students struggled to make sense of academic culture and conventions. Jay tends to blame himself for his inability to cope with the demands of reading rather than on the social conditions, discourses and practices that are operationalized at higher education institutions and which hinder students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Many participants narrated stories of financial hardship and in his conversation with me, Jay talks about how a lack of finance has severely limited his experience at university and illustrates a sense of the economic distance between himself and his contemporaries:

I mean most of the students, well almost 95% of them, all live in halls and I mean they are all together, all one big community and they all have their own things to do. You've got the JCR which organises like loads of social events which as a mature student you're not really part of unless you pay a certain amount of money to be part of it and I couldn't afford to do it, so I didn't. You've got to pay to do any sport and I just can't afford it (IR9)

Hutchings (2003:159) claims that financial costs are often regarded as the greatest barrier to working class students' participation in higher education; contemporary students have the largest and most rapidly rising debts since student loans were introduced. Jay goes on to reveal that his financial situation, similar to that of Christopher before, results in him being homeless which has a devastating effect on his university experience:

I went to the college for help and they did help me for two weeks. They put me up in one of their flats in the halls of residence but that's all they could do and it didn't come to anything. I still ended up sleeping about, sleeping rough, sleeping in the

car so it was a bit of help for two weeks but it's not what I need and they haven't been able to help me anymore. The best thing they could offer me was putting me in with some old fella who had his own house but it was like £50 a week and I couldn't take my son there so it just wasn't viable and that was the best that they could do. My university doesn't seem to be able to offer much support to a single father with a son (IR9).

Jay's story of experiencing financial hardship, becoming homeless and being responsible for his young son is not representative of all participants in this study but I include the narrative to highlight the differences that exist *within* communities of students in higher education that have served, or are serving in the British Army. Whilst there is research that recognises the increasing diversity of the student population, there is less that recognises the heterogeneity that exists within identified groups. Students like Jay generate different priorities, attitudes and actions to that of traditional students in higher education, undertaking their learning with un-validated experiences and identities, resulting in a form of deep unease and uncertainty whilst studying in university.

The pressures felt by Jay are arguably exacerbated by being a single father and dichotomous to the ways in which university life is organised, relying on assumption that students are young school leavers unencumbered by family responsibilities. In a study that investigates the experiences of students with dependent children, Marandet and Wainwright (2010:116) reveal that the majority of their participants viewed higher education institutions as operationalizing non-inclusive social environments that foster the exclusion of particular groups of students, manifesting, for example, in a lack of university childcare facilities. Despite university pledges to encourage new and different groups of students, there is a sense that discriminatory practices are perpetuated whereby the onus is on students to 'fit in'. For Jay, a mature student with familial responsibilities and limited financial resources, the prejudicial nature of institutionalised policies and practices implicitly suggest that he adjusts to the model of the traditional higher education student model.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, the autobiographies of Susan, Charles, Christopher, Jeremy, Josie and Jay describe the powerful significance of social class, how it exists in hidden, complex

ways that can be personally injurious and damaging. Participants reveal their perilous experiences of compulsory education that are shaped by inequalities of power and oppression, educationally situating working class children within deficit student models. Eager to escape such punitive circumstances, participants enlist into the institution of the British Army that fosters a sense of sanctuary and salvation.

I shine light upon the experiences of a group of British Army university students, who currently inhabit the dark shadows of higher education un-detected and hidden from view; in effect, students in camouflage. Participants narrate their conscious awareness of how a working class, military background is seemingly incongruent with that of their contemporaries, resulting in their deep sense of unease in their university institutions.

The privileging of traditional student models from the middle class ignores the different world views, interests and beliefs of students from the British Army, and illustrates how the experiences of this student population are framed within discourses of difference and marginalisation. Implicit and explicit exclusionary higher education institutional practices combine to create a site of tension where education becomes a metaphorical battleground for these participants.

Chapter 5: Narratives of Resilience and Achievement

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I continue the findings of my investigation by addressing the second purpose of this work which is:

- To investigate how notions of identity affect the UK higher education experience of students from the British Army

Two research questions guide this chapter:

- What military and academic identities do a particular group of British Army personnel possess and self-perceive when studying in higher education?
- How and to what extent do these identities intersect, collide and coalesce?

Analysis of stories indicates that participants engage in identity choices that are differentially available depending upon the situational context. Weaving through the stories are decisions of preference or deference as to whether participants (re)construct identities that privilege their soldierhood in the British Army or acquiesce to the mores of studenthood in higher education. The stories reveal that prioritising the (re)construction of soldierhood intersects with what it is to be a student in three key areas; as an enduring disposition shaped by the subjective warrant; as a protective defence when exposed to existential moments of vulnerability and risk; and when performing a particular sense of self in higher education.

Despite attempts made by many UK universities to operationalize 'widened participation' over the last two decades (Burke, 2012) and in spite of the increasing diversity of the student population, participants describe hurts of marginalisation and expose the covert culture of authority that exists in higher education. Interviewees illuminate the way in which (re)constructions of soldierhood collide with institutional orthodoxy that privileges stereotypical models of 'the learner' whilst failing to recognise students in higher education with a British Army background.

Identity formation can be regarded as a multiple, fluid and sometimes contradictory process linked to shifting contexts. This aspect of identity (re)construction is illustrated by participants when the seemingly disparate constructions of soldierhood and studenthood coalesce at the critical point of academic autonomy. At this important juncture, notions of 'soldier' and 'student' blend to make a significant favourable contribution towards academic accomplishment.

Analysis indicates that students with a British Army background develop complex identities that encounter profound challenges whilst they study in higher education. The barriers they experience highlight the tension between their past and present autobiographies and describe how the domains of soldierhood and studenthood are perceived as incongruent. Understanding how participants traversed the conflict they narrated between their military and socio-economic habitus and being 'a student' became a key focus during the examination of my research findings. Emerging from the data, and grounded in what key participants contribute to this work through their words and experience, is the way that resilience mediates the competing identity constructions.

As an interdisciplinary researcher, I introduce the concept of resilience not to simply juxtapose existing knowledge from different disciplines but to firmly integrate epistemological and theoretical perspectives from anthropology and education, providing a more comprehensive and original insight to the identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army. Such an inclusive and dynamic approach enables me to overcome disciplinary monism privileging one particular method or theory over another and bring together in an original creative way, a concept pertinent to both disciplines.

In UK higher education research the concept of resilience has yet to flourish with scarce studies attempting to define and examine what is meant by the term and how it may be operationalized in students. This is despite the increasing concerns of student retention research pointing to the importance of the ways in which students manage their learning ability in adverse circumstances. The current study therefore represents a major contribution to knowledge and academic scholarship concerned

with understanding the ways in which resilience contributes to the learning experiences of students. In this study, resilience manifests as a penetrable membrane between soldierhood and studenthood that is punctured depending upon the social context. By drawing on their capacities of resilience that foster a 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes, 2008:28) participants are able to negotiate the uncertain terrain of risk and vulnerability that emerges in (re)constructions of soldier and student identities.

To survive an unfamiliar higher education system participants illustrate the ways in which resilience is a powerful contributory factor towards academic accomplishment. The students in this study challenge and defy what they perceive as higher education orthodoxy by overt and covert strategies by utilising forms of resilience that promote and instil protection, endurance and adaptability.

Participants who have not yet been introduced in this study are made known by their biographic details and those who have been introduced elsewhere are referred to by their names only to avoid duplication of details. I organise this chapter thematically in order to clearly indicate the key strands of my analysis.

5.2 The primacy of the soldier

A clear thread to emerge from the stories of participants is the attachment to an enduring and fixed construction of soldier identity. Such an understanding is congruent with narrative identity paradigms espousing a psychosocial perspective that incorporates both psychological dimensions and the effect of the environment and relations (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). The underlying assumption of perspectives that argue for an 'inner' self is that whilst identity is a combination of cognitive and social relations, the individual and interiority is privileged over the social (ibid). There is a deep understanding for the centrality of experience and the private world of the individual as a conscious decision maker and emphasis is placed on the internalisation of life stories. Whilst the socio-cultural dimension of narratives is acknowledged, fundamentally each story is unique to each person because each individual's lived and inner experience forms a unique, interior configuration (Smith and Sparkes, 2008:9).

McAdams (1993) suggests that it is not until late adolescence or young adulthood that individuals start to think of their lives in storied terms, which adds an important perspective to this research as the majority of interviewees are mature learners whose narratives comprise a particular potency shaped over time and experience. When in higher education, mature participants bring with them powerful accumulated identities that have been influenced by myriad social and structural factors including the habitus, predisposing them to behave in certain ways (Collins, 2002) according to the salience of the situational context. The resulting combination of these components is that mature students bring a particular crucial resource or capital to their studying, which heavily influences their learning practices and challenges stereotypical conceptualisations of what is meant by 'the learner' in higher education.

The essence of the experience of students with a British Army background is encapsulated in the way that the educational system is unable to accommodate this specific population and the identities they bring to higher education. Rather than narrating stories of assimilation into the practices of higher education, participants tell how at the intersection of soldierhood and studenthood, a soldier identity is privileged and surfaces hierarchically. By drawing on forms of resilience associated with a capacity to endure and continue in light of the demands placed upon them as new mature entrants to higher education, interviewees are able to persevere and persist in the strange and unfamiliar environment of higher education.

Ailsa's story typifies the way in which soldierhood is preferred. Bored with the monotony of undemanding employment, Ailsa (47) joined the British Army in 1989 and served 7 years in the military police, specialising in drug detection dog handling. After leaving the military, Ailsa completed a degree in Childhood Studies with the Open University and is now attending a northern university studying for a PhD in Education. She describes the way in which she perceives an enduring identity:

Unless you've actually been in the army it's really hard to explain how that has an impact on your life. I only did seven years but it's, it's everything about me....it is me....it's my character, it's my sense of humour, it's, it's everything, you know. It's kind of like it is in you, it's instilled in you, you know, and I don't think you can ever get away from it. Once you've been a soldier you are always a soldier (IR4)

Ailsa's narrative is shaped by the experiences she has been exposed to and in her interview passionately describes how being a soldier is a perpetual state of inner-being, suggesting her pursuit for narrative coherence. Her quest for order and harmony is indicative of the importance she places on soldierhood and how this is perceived as her primary identity. She speaks in terms that imply identity is 'inside' or hidden, something private that is not visible outside the corpus.

Participant Mylo (31) makes a similar point to Ailsa concerning the primacy of the soldier identity by remarking that it is a 'lifestyle', indicating an entity that is ever present and stretches across the life course. Joining the army in 2002 as a junior soldier, Mylo has progressed through the ranks and is now Captain of a sub-group of up to 120 soldiers. At the time of our conversation, Mylo is studying full-time for an in-service degree (Information Systems with Business) at a northern university. Military personnel who undertake a British Army in-service degree are mainly limited to technical and engineering courses and receive remuneration from the military whilst studying. Mylo elaborates:

You join up and it's not a career, it's a whole life-style it really is, because you join up to be a soldier and you are soldier. That's brings us to another good point because being a soldier is not what we do, it's who we are (IR16-17)

Emphasizing the notion of a 'life-style', Mylo suggests a preference for his soldier identity to be regarded as a long-term, personally situated project rather than a phenomenon rooted in social relations. Building on his sense of identity as a persisting thread, Mylo recognises that when he enlisted, he was aware of the 'life-style' that was expected of him as a soldier in the British Army.

A constant sense of military identity is also referred to by Adam (45) who in 1989 joined the Territorial Army (now known as the Army Reserve) and is now second in command of his squadron. Adam is a full time BSc Construction and Project Management student at a northern university in his final year. Adam notes:

It's different at education....it's more about me as an individual, I'm sort of there, but I'm not in the heart of it, academia is not the heart of me'. The military side of life, that is me, and I'm very comfortable with that and I don't know why it is (IR19)

Whilst a student in higher education, Adam draws on an identity that has been shaped by the social influences he has been exposed to and suggests that it is this which lies at his 'heart'. The implicit inference is that identity is an essential component of the corpus, endlessly beating steadily. By using the metaphor of the heart, it is possible for Adam to un-self-consciously articulate his underlying feelings and understandings that may be problematic for him to express otherwise. Interestingly, Adam makes the point that he is 'very comfortable' with his sense of military identity, which tacitly suggests he is uncomfortable when a student in higher education. The feeling of alienation that Adam hints at emerges in the tension that arises when soldierhood intersects with studenthood.

What the narratives of Ailsa, Mylo and Adam articulate is the disposition of a subjective warrant (Lortie, 1975) that assists individuals in choosing a particular occupation. Upon enlisting, Ailsa, Mylo and Adam will have had explicit expectations of what a career in the Armed Forces would comprise as a result of their exposure to multi-media and popular/high culture influences. Their enlistment with the British Army takes place because of their belief and anticipation that they are able and competent to carry out the range of military duties expected.

Being physically fit for example, is often a pre-requisite for military personnel and it is unlikely that Ailsa, Mylo or Adam, or other participants enlisted without expecting training that comprises rigorous testing of physical ability. Keeping physically active is thus a desirable quality for joining the British Army and interviewees will have aspired to achieving and maintaining acceptable levels, attracting some individuals and repelling others. As an institution the army employs people of different dispositions and life circumstances; yet, the framework of the British Army Standards and Values (British Army, 2008) doctrine ensures that all individuals possess a shared understanding of what is expected of them in a given situation. What a subjective warrant evokes in this study is an intangible sense of identity that exists *before* enrolling with the British Army and which, as a disposition to understanding what is expected of oneself as a soldier, *continues* to prevail as an identity thread when my participants become learners in higher education.

The particular subjective warrant that military students bring with them to their learning and university environments adds to the marginalisation of their position as students in higher education. Already influenced by a habitus that engenders a sense of being a 'fish out of water', the subjective warrant that participants bear is not the warrant sought and valued by university policies and practices. Instead, the subjective warrant that higher education practitioner's privilege is concerned with the ability of students to 'fit in' with a particular model of what is expected of students. Thus, students who fall outside of these ideological parameters and who lack the required valued warrant are pathologised and discussed mainly in terms of 'difference' and the need for student support.

5.3 Existential moments of soldierhood

Another distinct strand to emerge from my findings is how, at the point of intersection between soldierhood and studenthood, participants (re)construct a soldier identity that surfaces hierarchically during existential moments of uncertainty and flux. During these times of 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991), retrieving and elevating the concept of a military identity restores a sense of stability to an otherwise vulnerable self. Participants in my study contradict normative 'middle class' constructions of higher education students that emphasise opportunities to leave home, to make new friends and to experience a broadening of horizons. Similarly, participants also contradict the normative model of 'a student' according to variables such as entry qualifications, age, class, race, gender and disability. Emerging powerfully from the narratives is a tangible sense of difference from dominant perceptions of what it is to be a student in higher education. The influence of participants' habitus combined with their specific military subjective warrant merge to shape identities that are atypical and alien to higher education normative models in distinct but largely invisible socio-cultural dimensions.

Cultivating a sense of turmoil and alienation in higher education are narratives that lament a loss of military camaraderie and these stories illustrate how soldierhood is privileged hierarchically over the concept of studenthood. The isolation that develops for participants whilst in higher education provokes existential moments when they are bereft of known and familiar systems. At these times of personal instability,

resilience manifests as a form of immunity from personal collapse that enables participants to reclaim (re)constructions of soldierhood. By drawing on the familiar soldier identity, interviewees demonstrate the ways in which they are driven and dynamic scholars rather than students who are brittle and broken when faced with isolation in higher education.

In my interview with Ailsa, soldierhood is promoted by describing the way in which camaraderie is experienced in the military and how this is an exclusive practice absent elsewhere:

We've got a very different sense of humour, I don't know what it is, it just feels different. It's very hard to say exactly what it is that makes me feel this way, it's just different. Is it the training....is it the experience....working so close with other people, the camaraderie.....I don't know what it is, but maybe it's all those things combined (IR4)

A similar comment is made by Brandon, who is 40 and has served as a ground liaison officer with both the Royal Air Force and the British Army, taking part in active service in Afghanistan and the Falklands. Brandon has recently completed a BA (Hons) in Leadership and Management at a northern university and is now an Army Careers advisor. He notes:

We work a great deal closer than our civilian counterparts and that's to do with the banter and humour that we share. We are very sexist at times, and our humour and how we speak to each other might be hard for others to understand. It's just part of being in the military (IR5)

An important aspect of identity maintenance for military personnel is the way they validate and share their experiences with other members of the Armed Forces by for example attending commemorative parades. As scholars in higher education, military personnel are *in situ* cut adrift from the everyday camaraderie they experience(d) in the British Army and, they maintain, are isolated figures denied a sense of solidarity and companionship with their fellow students. Faced with the insecurity that isolation fosters, students from the British Army reclaim their military identity that acts as a type of carapace, or form of protective resilience.

Echan also exemplifies a sense of the alienation that a military background provokes whilst being a student in higher education, enlisting in 1998 he attended the Royal

Military Academy, Sandhurst in 2008 where he qualified as a Platoon Commander. He is a second year full-time student at a university in the Midlands studying Automotive Product Design BSc as an in-service degree with the British Army. Echan believes that he is 'the only person in the university who is an in-service degree officer and the only person in my year from the military....I am completely by myself' (IR3). Echan's perceived sense of complete isolation is made clear when he reveals how his military identity is constructed and compares this with his perception of studenthood:

I've spent a year at Sandhurst, 13 years in the army and in my last job was responsible for £6-7million worth of kit and twenty blokes and now I'm another student kicking around in tracksuit bottoms and a t-shirt looking like a bum. (IR14)

Echan pathologises the notion of a student identity model in preference to that of 'soldier' and refers to himself during our conversation several times as a 'commissioned officer', indicating the importance of the stringent hierarchical structure of the British Army that is necessary to maintain obedience and conformity.

What is interesting about Echan's comments is the importance he places on his military background and his capacity to be responsible for those under his command. Despite these not inconsiderable military achievements, at university Echan is obliged to disregard his soldierhood that is formally unrecognised at higher education institutions and defer to an ideology of what constitutes the normative 'student'. In many ways, Echan's torturous appraisal of his isolation in higher education illuminates his profound unease at attempting to conform to institutional orthodoxy that anticipates and privileges stereotypical student models. As a student in higher education, Echan is duty bound to serve the academic institution he attends but this inclination is tempered with a realisation that he shares an educational environment with students different from himself. As such, Echan is stranded in the borderlands of higher education which is fraught with the conflict of depending upon the institution for the advancement of his military career, whilst at the same time experiencing a subtle form of social exclusion.

Expressing the primacy of soldierhood is also evident in the narrative of Ralph (59) who joined the British Army at age 22 and retired in 2007 following injuries and illness sustained whilst deployed in Iraq. Ralph studied for a BA with the Open University

whilst serving and since retiring has completed a part-time MA course in World War Studies. He tells me that:

I was a soldier, a soldier who was studying and if I was to do another course, which I know would drive my wife around the bend, I would still probably put myself down as a veteran or retired military rather than part-time student (IR11)

Ralph's playful account illustrates the way in which individuals can construct many ideas of who they are and is evocative of the ways that identities can be reconstructed depending upon the situational context. When considering future educational programmes, Ralph's preference is to be identified as a 'soldier', 'veteran' or 'retired military' suggesting his deep disinclination to be regarded as a student. For Ralph, when encountering moments of having to think about who he would like to be, soldierhood in its many forms is privileged above all else and becomes a metaphorical anchor in moments of uncertainty.

The stories of Ailsa, Brandon, Echan and Ralph demonstrate how the identities of soldier and student intersect at existential points of turmoil and flux. Overcoming such uncertainty involves participants drawing from their multiple and fluid identities an identity that enables a sense of familiar continuity and coherence. The different conceptualisations of 'studenthood' or 'soldierhood' are characterised by a form of cultural dominance that affords some identities to be more strongly developed than others indicating in this study, the powerful and enduring influence of the habitus and subjective warrant. Such a dominance of one identity tacitly suggests the suppression of another identity (van Meijl, 2010:77) hinting at the way identities can be hierarchical.

5.4 Preferring to perform

Narratives that privilege social relations and performance form a further important strand of analysis in my research. Here, the stories underline the social relatedness of identity and are not concerned with ideas of an internalised, fixed or individual self, but are instead accounts that prioritise social processes and the multiple, fluid nature of identity (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Performative identity focuses on the way that language and behaviour constitute the self and the ensuing relationship between the orator and the audience.

Strongly emerging from the narratives of my participants is the way in which military personnel adapt and suppress constructions of their identities to others so that the 'self' that is presented and observed is, in their perception, contextually appropriate. Obscuring their real selves at certain moments indicates the choice in how, when and to whom my interviewees reveal or hide their legitimate identity and suggest the emotional 'effort' military personnel undertake at higher education.

Brandon tells me that he can 'dance to the tune of the superior at university to give them what they want' (SR7) and Walter, who is age 25, and a reservist since 18, remarks that 'I certainly have different hats for different places, if that makes sense' (IR3). Adam also makes a similar point, commenting that his 'alter ego in the T.A. was a very high achiever' (IR14) and goes on to elaborate how constructions of soldierhood intersect with civilian life:

So, there are some things that make it very, very hard to make the switch but being in the T.A. for years you have to learn to have that mechanism where you can literally flick a switch and one minute you're in civilian mode and the next moment you're in military mode (IR14)

When exploring how interviewees negotiate the tension between soldierhood and studenthood, I asked participants if they were aware of current systems of student support in their respective institutions and whether they would access these systems if they felt it necessary. During my analysis of narratives, a clear division developed between the stories I listened to.

Military students engaged in on-line learning with the Open University narrated stories that strongly suggested they were satisfied with, and experienced easy access to, existing systems of on-line student support. In contrast, Armed Forces students at campus-based education privilege their soldier identity and resist accessing existing student support services. Comparing the experiences of military personnel at campus-based education with that of those engaged in online learning is a potential area for future research and provides a glimpse to the idea that on-line learning environments develop different experiences and identities. Alternatively, perhaps it suggests that an on-line environment enables students to keep their preferred identity especially when assailed with the diverse emotions of learning.

What this finding strongly indicates is the way in which on-line learning environments provide a filter of invisibility to students creating a sense of hidden or anonymous identity. In comparison, students at campus based higher education institutions have no such filter thus causing my participants whose habitus and subjective warrant are in conflict with idealised models, to be highly discernible. The narratives demonstrate the 'adaptability' view of resilience that has associations with strategy building and cognitive-behavioural type processes that students operationalize in order to adapt positively to change.

Resilience is operationalized by interviewees as an adaptive mechanism against the everyday acts of challenge and hostility to their socio-cultural background that they encounter in higher education. Having to employ such a strategy illustrates the way that students with a British Army background are incongruent with ideological conceptualisations of what it is to be a student in higher education. Rather than conform to current policies and practices that situate students requiring support within deficit models, participants eschew systems of assistance and instead construct adaptive strength.

Reflecting on the current systems of campus-based student support, Ailsa tells me that academically she 'just got on with it' (IR12) and that she 'would not have approached student services....that's just a no, no' (IR12). When asked why she had answered in this particular way, Ailsa tells me:

I think Joe Public imagines the military to be hugely able and confident people, and asking for help when they come out really goes against the grain. There's just no way. Just no way. It doesn't matter what the cost is, I'm not asking for help. I don't want to be seen as a failure (IR21)

Ailsa's comments indicate her perception of the way in which military personnel are perceived as 'warrior types' (Woodward and Jenkins, 2011) by historical and temporal discourses of what it is to be a soldier in the British Army and how these perceptions become embedded in soldierhood. Evident from Ailsa's narrative is the complex identity of students with a British Army background, arguably indicating the discrepancies that exist between institutional idealised models of the student

(Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003) and the way in which higher education institutions fail to acknowledge this incongruence.

In view of the significance placed on issues of trauma, disability and mental health problems that are prevalent in the academic literature (Dandeker, Wessely, Iversen and Ross 2003; Samele 2013) concerning both serving and veteran military personnel it is disturbing that higher education institutions avert their gaze from this particular student population. In the UK there is a dearth of literature that is devoted to the role in which university support systems, and in particular counselling centres, can support students from the Armed Forces. As students with a British Army background are an invisible population, the conflicting demands and identity strains that are associated with notions of soldierhood and studenthood have remained unexplored until now.

A majority of the stories I listened to in this research reflected Ailsa's comments above and were somewhat anticipated. Christopher's narrative that follows builds upon these findings in an extremely powerful manner and provides an illustration of the way that resilience can emerge in students at high risk during their higher educational trajectories. Although he 'knocked on a few doors just to get the essays sorted' (IR12), Christopher rejected accessing existing student support systems when faced with chronic difficulties in his personal life:

I broke up with my long term partner and I lost my house. At the time I had to find money because my partner emptied my bank account (IR14). There was no-one here in support services that I would have approached (IR17)

Evidence indicates that when faced with adverse circumstances in civilian environments, some military personnel are unlikely to ask for support (Higate, 2000; Livingston, 2009; Ormerod, 2009). This can result in dire consequences for some individuals and highlights the potential increase in vulnerability that higher education students face when they have served in the British Army. The problems that Christopher faced were complex and created a profound sense of a self in flux and turmoil in a higher education context that was unfamiliar and isolating:

It was very, very difficult for me because my family are in another part of the country and I came here with my girlfriend and settled here. So there was only me and her and her two boys from her previous relationship so I had no support

whatsoever from family. When we split up during the start of my second year I had basically no family (IR23)

When I was listening to Christopher's story it was difficult to understand why he had not approached systems of student support at such a stressful time. It became clear that by drawing on his previous military experience he is able to disguise his true situation of peril and instead 'manages' his identity to camouflage the turmoil he experiences:

I mean it's the army. In the army it's I say and you do and it's very much instruction based. And there is no alternative to, they say and you do, and if you don't you are in trouble and there is no deviation from that whatsoever. The army is a totally different world to academia....it's a separate world when you're told when to eat, to sleep and told to a certain extent what you are doing from day to day with all decisions made for you (IR9)

Christopher is sustained by referral to his (re)construction of soldierhood, remarking 'I always managed to get my work done no matter what was going on in my personal life' and that he 'never even put in a mitigating circumstances form' (IR13). Similarly, Adam refers to himself as a 'confident individual and very competent individual' (IR6) and mentions the helpfulness of his programme leader who pointed him 'in the right direction' (IR5) but goes on to say:

I found him very approachable yes, but I found that perhaps I was reluctant to ask for help because I think I perceive it as being sort of.... letting myself down and perhaps you know, looking back and thinking to myself maybe it was a bit of pride or something like that that probably stemmed from the military (IR5)

What is evident from all these stories, but in particular Christopher's, is the high level of emotional management and identity performance that students with a British Army background engage in that camouflages their sense of authentic self. Instead, a veneer is developed for the benefit of others that 'changes' the way they really are. Their emotional management is an attempt to hide their emotions or feelings so that what is presented is perceived to be appropriate for the given context. Participants have considered the situation that they find themselves in and reject the higher education student deficit model that 'seeks help' and instead perform to appropriate social guidelines inculcated by prior social influences and the habitus.

The narratives of Ailsa, Christopher and Adam invoke a sense of the 'emotional labor' (Hochschild, 1983) that some students endure in higher education in that they suppress the emotions they experience. Rather than confess to a sense of vulnerability, participants camouflage their 'true' self and 'manage' their emotional feelings to create a desired observable display to others. Consequently, what might be considered the true self retreats into internal refuge. The notion of an authentic self, emerging under ideal conditions is salient in regard to the military: stories of war and strife from which a 'hero' emerges and shines in the face of adversity have become modern day fables.

Josie and Jay also describe the problematic nature of military personnel seeking help and the ways that existing student support systems are projected remain unsatisfactory for this unique student population. Josie firstly illustrates how vital it is to understand constructions of military identity in higher education:

We have a building here (at her university)and it's a bit like a bunker really, and they ran a module and my colleague was saying to me that they had a nurse on the module. It was a medication module and there are no windows in this building so it is literally like a bunker and this student ran out of the room. She's already a qualified nurse and she's a post-graduate student and when they sat down and talked to her she felt as though she was back in Iraq and being bombed and no-one knew she was in the military (IR11)

Noting that she moved from a 'very controlled environment into a very much *laissez faire* environment and I found it very difficult' (IR2), Josie 'focuses on the assignments at hand' (IR12) to aid with her transition to university. I ask Josie what she would do if she experienced difficulties whilst studying at higher education:

If I had a problem in academia I would probably go to either my personal tutor or module tutor but it does get a bit messy because then it becomes is it an academic problem or a pastoral problem? Depending on what the problem is, then you would see the appropriate person but sometimes I find that too many people are involved in it and there's not....I suppose it's different for each faculty but there's no focus on who is the person I need to find. So people have to sort it out for themselves. What is my problem, who do I need to see? That might be difficult and for the military person as well, they will never admit they've got a problem (IR11)

Although Josie recognises the problematic nature of seeking help for higher education students that have a military background, she also hints at the paradox that seemingly exists:

I think military people just want to be understood, they don't want to be tret as if they're going to be a problem. They just want to be understood and people to say, look our culture is no different from someone say from Africa or Asia – we are a culture and we're different and we're used to having things done in a certain way (IR3)

The narrative indicates that Josie does recognise herself as embodying a certain construction of identity that is unique and hence seeks the desire to be 'understood' in the civilian environment of higher education. Yet, she rejects being identified as 'problematic' and resiliently rebuffs being situated within a deficit student model by eschewing existing student support services. What Josie's reflection illustrates is the way in which certain narratives are seemingly ignored by higher education institutions whilst orthodoxy privileges and prioritises others.

When I ask Jay if the university he attends could do anything more to aid him in his studies he pauses for a while and then tells me:

Rather than sending us off and sort of 'do that' or 'make your own groups' and 'go and do this project', I think it would be better to do more structured work....like you need to be in this certain area, at a certain time, to do this, no excuses. The university is big on self, self-learning and I suppose that is part of the thing but....you know in the army there is a lot of structure and there is a difference when you come to university and they just say 'go off and learn so and so....'(IR8)

Jay's request for more structured academic work was not shared with my other participants but I include it here because his comments suggest the way in which students with a British Army background are not homogeneous and will have differing perspectives. But what lies at the core of Jay's narrative and is consistent with the other stories is the lacuna of understanding that exists in higher education institutions with regard to students that have served in the British Army.

5.5 Collision and conflict in higher education

In the process of analysing my narrative data, I developed a more nuanced understanding of narrative identity that included scrutinising the political

perspectives that underpin relationships in higher education. Such a perspective investigates the discursive practices that take place in universities and the effect of these upon students with a British Army background. The stories of my participants expose a barbed thread that describes how the insidious nature of higher education praxis has the capacity to covertly shape, develop and marginalise notions of student identity.

Perceptions of soldierhood and studenthood collide and shape robustly conflicting identity positions. Despite such injurious experiences, the narratives suggest how resilience is a key feature in overcoming the institutional exclusion that students with a British Army background encounter at university. Participants demonstrate how, by drawing on forms of resilience associated with endurance and adaptability they resist the hegemonic social and cultural pressures that surround them in university and persist with their studies.

Expanding upon what makes him feel uneasy in higher education, Walter turns attention to the practices and policies that cast a heavy veil over students that have served, or are serving in the British Army:

The academic community is indifferent and unsympathetic towards the military. They don't have any policies that help reflect either what military personnel are committed to or have a sense of identity in rather the same way that you get a gender sensitivity or religious sensitivity. There is no military sensitivity that I've seen. Is it the place of academia to be neutral on these issues? I've never seen any support for the military by any university figure even though it is fairly popular to do that, either politically or charitably (IR11)

Walter's assessment points a firm finger of culpability at higher education institutions that fail to recognise the identity of military personnel and the way in which exclusion practices shaped by discourse marginalises identities. Without recognition and inclusion, institutions cannot cater for students that have served or are serving in the British Army or investigate their learning needs and experiences. Such exclusion highlights the inequalities that persist in higher education and the way that universities operate a form of cultural hurt that promotes exclusive rather than inclusive practices. Walter's testimony that his university does not have an affiliation or adherence to the military suggests that the visibility or recognition of any form of

Armed Forces connection is an issue not just of process and structure but also of compositional diversity at both an individual and university level. Walter is one of many interviewees who, when asked what would make higher education a less conflicting environment for a student with a military background, suggests 'some kind of point of contact or liaison with other military people' (IR9).

The wistful ideal that Walter describes illustrates the way in which higher education students with a British Army background are captives of their own background, unable to visualise a self beyond their military experience or their working class heritage as discussed in Chapter Four. As adult learners returning to education, military students are often in a period of transition in either their careers or personal lives, suggesting the potential for change and transformation. Yet, rather than finding an education institution that stimulates utilising their soldierhood as a rich and valuable personal resource, the marginalisation that students with a British Army background experience manifests in narratives lacking in any sense of edifying vision of the future. In many ways, the narratives lack any vibrant visions and are empty of hope; there is no mention of foreseeable or likelihood of change to the higher education situation of these participants, or for similar future students.

Also remarking on the failure of higher education institutions to recognise the identity of military personnel is Rex (29). Softly spoken, Rex gives the impression of having an air of reluctance or possibly apprehension of speaking with me despite agreeing to be interviewed. Born and educated in Jamaica, Rex is representative of the ethnically diverse composition of the modern British Army and joined the military in 2002, serving for five years. He is now a full time higher education student studying at a northern university studying Civil Engineering. In our conversation, Rex poignantly tells me:

I don't think my university even recognise people like me. For me, just even start identifying us would be helpful. It might not be for everyone but at least you have the option to disclose this, and if you want to, you can, at least the option is there (IR8)

Rex's narrative evokes a picture of a student identity that is invisible to his higher education institution and suggests the way in which he is subject to the interplay of

higher education power dynamics that position him as an 'outsider' in comparison to student models who are recognised and validated. Being undetectable is a point made by Ryan and Sackery (1966) who write from the perspective of being USA academics from the working class. They note that 'those who hold sway in the academy are invited to be self-congratulatory, even pompous, and the persons at the bottom are encouraged, if not by persons by circumstances, to be envious, self-abnegating or invisible' (1966:78).

In addition to being imperceptible to his university, Rex also experiences a sense of being 'different from other students' (IR2) and remarks, 'only a few people here know about my military career because I don't talk about it that much' (IR2). Despite these identity inhibitors, and finding the 'transition from the military to university difficult' (IR1), Rex re-conceptualises his marginality and adjusts to the academic demands of his university. He is now in his final year.

Both Walter and Rex speak movingly in terms of identity marginalisation and discrimination at their institutions of higher education. Without any formal opportunity to indicate their military background, students that have served or are serving in the British Army are denied the construction and recognition of a meaningful identity within the university context. Whilst it may be claimed that some students with a British Army background can develop an identity based on isolation within this institution, a number of participants suggest they are far from content with such a restricted existence. Despite the rhetoric of widening participation, that aims to address the under-representation of certain groups in higher education, the stories of participants highlight the way in which notions of exclusion reproduce existing practices of inequalities.

Writing from the perspective of widening participation, Burke (2012) argues that power relations frame the social contexts within which processes of recognition take place. In order to 'fit' into socially acceptable notions of being a 'student', the processes of recognition require legitimation by those who hold positions of power and authority. The testimonies of Walter and Rex indicate that such legitimation is lacking at their higher education institutions and that they experience a sense of

being de-valued and invisibility. Delpit (2012) claims that students who encounter micro-aggressions at university engage in a process dis-identification, a form of defence that shields against vulnerability and manifests in psychological insulation from academic life. In such cases, students dis-identify with the higher education institution, regarding themselves as 'distant visitors' who seek validation in other environments, becoming aliens rather than participatory individuals in the academic world. These issues point to the crucial nature of unpicking the subtle forms of power dynamics that exist in higher education, and the way in which military personnel are denied the right to validation and identification.

Walter and Rex's stories focus on the way that discursive higher education practices impinge on their sense of identity whilst students in higher education. Isolated and marginalised, they, and their fellow students who share a British Army background, undertake their university studies unrecorded, undetected and seemingly unwanted in higher education. If a key aim of widening participation is to redress historical exclusions and inequalities, then the narratives of participants deserve to be read, listened to and more importantly, heard.

Yet being heard is problematic when higher educational institutions privilege a particular narrative arc and dominant warrant that negates the experiences of those students who fail to conform to orthodoxy. Accordingly, the students in my research are indiscernible to higher education institutions as they represent counter-hegemony to normative models. The legitimacy of interviewees' narratives extends beyond their habitus and the subjective warrant; it is a potential world and 'truth' that is annulled and silenced by the discursive practices that prevail in higher education.

A further practice that has provided valuable insight to emerge from my analysis is the way in which participants experience academic demands and relationships with academic practitioners in higher education. Whilst some students narrated stories of satisfactory rapport with educators, this was not a universal finding. This deficit is an important area as a key part of settling into university is forming relationships with tutors as well as other students. Recent changes to the context of higher education have pushed student expectations further up the teaching and learning agenda

(Clinton, 2009), particularly as students are increasingly framed as 'customers' (Sander, Stevenson, King, and Coates, 2000). As 'service providers' in this new movement of what is meant by learning and teaching, suggestions are being made that teachers should modify their role to meet the changing demands of students (Clinton, 2009:23). Little attention has been given to examining the codes of conduct that constitute ethical professional behaviour in higher education, although in other professions, the medical profession for example, boundaries of the practitioner-client relationship are more tangible. This is partly due to the common practice of swearing to a medical or Hippocratic Oath that is incorporated into most medical schools (Huber, 2003; Hulkower, 2010), providing a structure of conduct by which physicians are expected to adhere. Narratives of participants in this study describe tutor-student relationships as remote, indicating that their expectations of these important relationships have not been met. Just as important however, are the expectations of the teacher and what may be regarded as student behaviour and the attainment of required levels of attainment (Clinton, 2009). What the narratives describe are teacher-student relationships that are caught in a culture of power that is covertly enacted in 'the rules of the classroom' (Delpit 1988:283) where certain codes relate to ways of talking, ways of writing, dressing and interaction.

Underlying the stories of participants are illustrations that demonstrate how codes of teaching and learning are proscribed within a particular discourse that seemingly fails to address the demands of an increasingly diverse student population. Socio-cultural theories of learning offer an alternative, more fluid conception of teaching, framing student participation in knowledge production. Within a socio-cultural framework, knowledge is constituted in the flow of meaning produced by people when they communicate together (Northedge, 2003). This has a particular salience for students from the British Army who bring to higher education knowledge shaped by a particular worldview that is seemingly currently outside of 'communication' in the classroom.

According to Wells and Claxton (2008) learning is not just concerned with the cognitive acquisition of skills or techniques but more broadly encompasses the development and cultivation of student dispositions, interests and values. It is argued

that such student nurturing fosters individuals with a more holistic capacity to engage with the uncertainties of the future.

The following narratives indicate the way in which certain socio- cultural practices and dynamics are part of the everyday higher educational discourse and that far from being a neutral, inclusive setting that embraces student diversity the classroom is an environment replete with specific cultural and communicative forms that shape inequality and disadvantage.

Alistair joined the British Army at age 16 in 1981 and is now 'doing secret stuff around the world' (IR1). He is currently studying for a degree in Forensic Science at a university in the Midlands. Although his lecturers have been 'great' (SR4), for Alistair, 'the trouble with academics is that they are not on this planet' (IR12). A lack of understanding as to the rich background that participants bring with them to higher education is also expressed by Echan who comments 'one of the lecturers asked me what I used to do in my previous job and he was amazed at the responsibility I had' (IR14).

Extending his narrative, Echan tells me that 'one of my main lecturers is so patronising....he's a lovely bloke and he doesn't seem to know that he's doing it....but he talks to you sometimes as if you're one of the children' (IR15). The following two sections from Echan explain how this is problematic:

His responsibility for the students is literally whilst they are in the university to get them through the course but my responsibility for my soldiers is that if that bloke goes home and ends up in trouble I'll go to court with that lad to give a character reference. You know, I've had 37 year old men crying at me because the wife has left them and I've had to sort out people's bank statements and things like that because they get themselves into debt. He doesn't have to deal with all that sort of thing does he? (IR15)

Recently we had a regimental dinner and we invited some of the key lecturers and the kids turned up in black ties and cocktail dresses and the officers wore mess dress with medals and stuff and whey they saw that some of the lecturers asked, 'What are the medals for?' 'They're from when we were on operations'. 'Oh, I didn't realise you were in the real army'....they sort of think....well, it's hard to know what they think. It's like they can see it on TV but they can't relate that to a real person standing in front of them (IR15)

Echan's narrative illustrates how tacit understandings in the university environment act as powerful mechanisms that shape relationships to form embedded, unchallenged components of the educational process. The deeply engrained culture of power and historical inequalities that prevail in higher education are lived out in the stories of participants and highlight the difficulty of conceptualising complex relations in forms that can be collected, measured and categorised. By denying students with a British Army background their own expert knowledge, this student population is, in effect, made mute and disempowered by the institution that purports to 'educate'. Such subtle, subliminal undermining of participants evokes the way in which resilience is not just a conceptual tool useful for analysis but is embodied in every day relationships in higher education and illustrates interviewees' 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes 2008:25).

Brandon also describes how his experience of being in university is challenging by telling me that 'going back to education....going back into a classroom where there were 20 year olds and I'm a 40 year old man, being spoken to like a child at times....you know I found that very difficult' (IR4). Interestingly, Brandon perceives the environment of higher education as a hierarchy similar to that which exists in the British Army:

So, as an example, one of my best friends is an officer and during the day he's Sir and I'm Sergeant and all that kind of stuff, and you can see that that's how it works in the classroom but once we're out its Steve and Simon and we're having a game of pool. You still have that fine line and it's the same within the academic environment' (IR13)

Brandon's comments illustrate the way in which he is positioned as a student or 'Sergeant' in the learning relationship with his tutor who he perceives as being 'Sir'. Interestingly, Delpit (1988:284), suggests that acknowledging personal power and admitting participation in the culture of power can be distinctly unsettling, whilst those who are less powerful, in this case students from the British Army, are most likely to distinguish the power variable most acutely. Certainly the narratives of Alistair, Echan and Brandon recognise the different levels of power that permeate their studying and are aware of their limited and unequal participation in obtuse

classroom dynamics. Consequently, it is seemingly impossible for Alistair, Echan and Brandon to become fully participating members of their higher education institutions.

Fundamentally, participants describe systems of exploitation and domination that persist covertly in order to maintain the dominant discourse of higher education. Whilst university policies and practices purport to encourage students to be participatory individuals in the learning process, the narratives indicate that higher education environments operate forms of social inequity similar to that which is an essential component of the British Army, relating to every one knowing their place. What this means for participants is that they are subject to pedagogical practices that reveal the culture of power covertly existing in higher education institutions.

5.6 Soldiers and students: 'being the best'

One thread that is difficult to untangle in my research is reconciling the way that military personnel vehemently eschew notions of student identity and yet at the same time place high value on, and purposefully strive towards, academic achievement. It has taken some while for me to gain the important insight that military students do possess shards of a student identity – and that in terms of accomplishment and achievement, the identities of soldier and student coalesce to construct a form of conscientious studenthood that manifests in a positive academic philosophy. Such a construction is congruent with the approach of military training that encourages personnel to resiliently be 'the best' in their field and reject contemplations of 'failure'.

The narratives of participants involve a rich blend of detailing how their British Army experience facilitates their academic achievement, suggesting the relational dynamism that exists between habitus and identity. Baker and Brown (2008:58) introduce the notion of 'aspirational habitus' to explain how Welsh participants draw on national imagery and symbolic resources to affirm their higher education studenthood. Similarly, students from the British Army in this study describe how the experience of the military enhances their approach to learning in higher education by explicitly subscribing to embodied dispositions shaped during their army career, utilising these as they strive for a studenthood shaped by a positive work ethos and a quest for academic achievement.

'Being meticulous and trying to get the maximum value out of any situation and managing my time, effort and resources enabled me to meet my deadlines and standards' (SR7) has been David's approach to academic achievement. David (39) has served in the British Army for 22 years and retired in 2012. He gained a BA in Business Studies with the Open University in 2006 and has completed an Advanced Management Achievement course at a northern university. David continues:

It's hard to put your finger on it really, I mean being in the military is a way of life so your expectations are higher than other people's. We expect the best from our guys in the military (IR8)

Curtis (26) makes a similar point, telling me:

The army encourages you no matter what you're doing, to succeed at it. In the army, if you're in a rubbish situation with a really bad plan and a mission you don't like, you still absolutely have to achieve it. So I've come into university saying I've been in the army now I'm doing this, now I must be the best at doing this, and when I move onto the next thing I must be the best at that as well, no matter what it is (IR9)

Curtis joined the British Army in 2007 after completing a four year undergraduate MEng at a university in South West England. During his army career, Curtis worked at Camp Bastion, Afghanistan and left the army after four years and is now a full time postgraduate student at a northern university, studying Computer Science.

Interestingly, participants spoke of being unable to anticipate or counter failure whilst a student in higher education which is almost a reversal of their compulsory educational experiences when many left school with precisely that experience of disappointment. What the comments of David and Curtis illustrate is the way in which narrative identity is neither fixed nor situated, but is a continual process of defining and refining of the self. Both interviewees (re)sort their previous life events to create differently crafted narratives, illustrating that a description once told as a tragedy can become a victory in another telling.

David and Curtis' comments allude to the way in which soldierhood coalesces with studenthood in higher education. In drawing on their military background that prioritises management and responsibility, students with a British Army background are autonomous, conscientious scholars who place great importance on

organisational skills. Analysis of their narratives reveals that the construction of studenthood is deferred to by participants when there is a quest for academic achievement. The indications are that interviewees embrace higher education practices that foster academic achievement, whilst at the same time discarding and disdaining other social dimensions of for example, student integration. Piper (1995:295), a working class academic from the USA, builds upon this disjunction by writing of the times she 'had to take the cloak of my education on and off frequently, always trying to fit in' and that 'her own pretence was an effort to fit into the dominant discourse when I felt I needed to'.

Although the narratives that describe a coalescence of soldierhood and studenthood relate to a deep quest for accomplishment at higher education, such a pursuit of achievement was problematic for some participants. The difficulty of speaking in terms of failure was demonstrated in my conversation with Jared, who is now 68 and joined the British Army in 1958, serving for almost 30 years. After talking for over an hour, Jared mentions:

I was a good student because I was a soldier but when I started the Doctorate I failed the first module which horrified me, I couldn't believe it...and the lady in the Doctorate office who's now left said it was because of the language and referencing. Someone shouldn't fail just because they haven't put a date in brackets after every name (IR12).

Apart from illustrating the way in which failing a module affected Jared, the narrative more broadly evokes a sense of the academic disadvantage he was exposed to in the first few months of returning to education after a long absence, and the lack of understanding he perceived regarding what was expected of him academically. For students with a military background the literacy practices of higher education are regarded as frequently unfamiliar, alienating and intimidating, which combine to heighten fears of disappointment. Achieving academic accomplishment in higher education is mainly predicated upon students' exposure to academic discourse, that is, the specific yet tacit discursive approach expected of students and their motivation to learn. Yet, appropriating academic discourse can be disproportionately complex for under-represented students similar to Jared who may encounter difficulty in adapting to new and different approaches to learning that emphasise a tightly

restricted understanding of what is of importance in academia and how academic prowess is demonstrated, whilst simultaneously navigating an unfamiliar socio-cultural environment. For Jared, these circumstances combine to result in a sense of 'failure' that is 'horrifying'.

The potential consequences of failure in the British Army are described first by Adam and then by Christopher and explain the ethos behind 'being the best' that participants bring with them to higher education. Christopher's narrative explains how reconfiguring soldierhood enables him to 'bully himself' (IR9) to complete assignments:

Failure is not an option because of the nature of the work....I'm a Royal Engineer and I'll give you an example. We think about the battle group coming through and advancing and we're going to put a bridge in. That battle group, all the tanks and whatever will come along at a certain time and its crucial that they get across the obstacle which may be a river, for example. So, for us Engineers, we have to be able to plan and construct that bridge to enable them to do that. Imagine them being stuck on the wrong side of the river because you haven't done your job properly' (Adam IR8)

I brought the mentality of the army to university....if I didn't get something done in the army I would be punished and I brought that mentality to university. If I had to have an essay written by a certain date, I would be punished if it wasn't handed in on time. I knew I wouldn't really be punished but that focus was there, that I may get thrown off the course or something. Even though I had troubles in my personal life, I got those essays done on time (Christopher IR9)

In this study habitus is employed as an analytical tool to frame concepts of identity, shedding light on the tensions and alignments that occur as participants oscillate between soldierhood and studenthood. Yet, as a dynamic relational concept, habitus is not solely concerned with rigid assumptions, but affords the opportunity for change as individuals encounter the unfamiliar. Evident in the stories of Adam and Christopher is the way in which soldierhood, shaped by the military habitus, embodies skills of achievement and accomplishment that facilitates the learning process in higher education.

An important further point of soldierhood and studenthood coalescence that emerges from the narratives is illustrated in the excerpt of Ailsa, who I introduced at the beginning of this chapter and who passionately described her belief that she 'was

once a soldier, always a soldier'. In the following small segment of narrative, the messiness and contradictory nature that encapsulates 'identity' is explicitly exposed and laid bare. When I ask Ailsa how she adapted to higher education after her military career, she remarks:

I just thought wow....all those books....it was wonderful and to feel like a student at that age, it was great....it was liberating...and yes, I did feel like a student....and I loved it and it was great'(IR10)

What the narrative clearly evokes is the way that Ailsa defers to notions of studenthood in higher education when the situational context is learning. As a temporary transformative experience, the membrane of resilience is punctured and Ailsa is happy to acquiesce to notions of what it is to be a student in higher education, restricting notions of soldierhood that were prominent in our earlier conversation.

Ailsa's narrative is not an isolated story that describes how being a mature student in university can develop liberating experiences; participant Hector (55) joined the British Army in 1977 after leaving school with 'no qualifications' (SR1) and retired in 2011 after active deployment to Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. He has just completed a six year part-time degree course in Theology, telling me that whilst studying, 'the experiences I had gained in the army gave me the confidence to have my voice heard' (SR4) but goes on to say 'I didn't want to come across as this retiring or old soldier because a lot of the kids would have rejected that, but there were young boys on that course who wanted a father figure to talk to' (IR2). Hector goes on to comment that 'I was not a soldier doing a degree, I was just an older person doing a degree (IR6) and that he wouldn't want to be 'a soldier on campus' (IR7). In Hector's account, the coalescence of soldierhood and studenthood manifests in the liberating experience of mentoring fellow students. This experience is not insignificant as Hector hints at the vulnerability he experienced when he retired from the British Army:

I moved from being what is considered quite an important person, even if it's only in your own head, to suddenly you are the guy that lives at No.29 and no-one in your road knows what you do for a living....and you know, maybe you lack a bit of importance because suddenly no-one is interested in you anymore (IR4)

Participants illuminate how constructions of soldierhood incorporate dispositions that strive to 'be the best' in order to successfully accomplish military operations – failure

on deployment is not a desired option. Soldierhood, combined with other socialising influences such as the habitus, the subjective warrant and resilience all combine to develop transformative experiences that coalesce with studenthood, developing confident and fruitful attitudes towards academic accomplishment in higher education. In the merger of soldierhood with studenthood, any notion of academic failure is dismissed by participants in the same way that the term is bound and tied to the unique experiences of their social history.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter I describe how participants' narratives indicate the way in which identity choices are differentially made available depending upon the salience of the social context and that weaving through the stories are decisions of preference or deference as to whether participants (re)construct identities that privilege their soldierhood in the British Army or acquiesce to studenthood in higher education. The stories reveal that prioritising the construction of soldierhood intersects with what it is to be a student in three key areas: as an enduring disposition shaped by the subjective warrant; as a protective defence when exposed to existential moments of turmoil and flux; and when performing a particular sense of self in higher education.

Participants describe cultural hurts of institutional marginalisation and illustrate the covert culture of authority and power that persists in higher education. Interviewees illuminate the way in which constructions of soldierhood collide with an orthodoxy that privileges stereotypical models of 'the learner' in higher education, whilst simultaneously failing to recognise and validate students from the British Army. Without such validation, interviewees are restrained in utilising their unique backgrounds, ideas, interests and specific cultural knowledge that might assist them to develop academically, remaining invisible and indiscernible.

That identity formation is a multiple, fluid and sometimes contradictory process linked to shifting contexts is demonstrated by participants in the way that their narratives reveal how constructions of soldierhood and studenthood coalesce at the critical point of academic autonomy and contribute favourably towards academic accomplishment. By drawing on their skills inculcated by a military habitus that

predisposes skills of organisation and responsibility, interviewees approach their learning in particular ways that anticipate achievement rather than failure.

Grounded in what key participants contribute to this work through their own words and experience is the way that resilience mediates the domains of soldierhood and studenthood. Manifesting as a penetrable metaphorical membrane, resilience is punctured and ruptured depending upon the social context. By drawing on their capacities of resilience that foster a 'talent for life', participants in this study favourably negotiate the otherwise conflicting identity constructions of soldier or student.

Chapter 6: Discussion: Reconnaissance of the terrain

6.1 Introduction

I bring together the conceptual framework, broader literature and findings concerned with my research in this chapter. During this synthesis I reflect, as a reconnaissance practice, back and forth to the key themes arising from the narratives I describe in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, discussing how these relate to the study aims and questions as presented in Chapter One. The purpose of this chapter is to diligently weave together the many individual strands and overlapping threads that comprise this work to present a completed tapestry detailing the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army.

I begin by providing an overview of how autobiography is a crucial approach to teasing out subtle and nuanced findings that would not be visible by alternative methods. Then, I refer to Chapter Four of this work, *Narratives of Sanctuary and Salvation* that has as its purpose a consideration of participants' thoughts and beliefs based on the first two research questions:

1. What are the educational autobiographies of a group of British Army personnel that have studied, or are studying in UK higher education?
2. What are the experiences of these British Army personnel within institutions of higher education?

Moving on, I provide a discussion of the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis and the relevance of this to my theorization before an analysis regarding participants' responses and beliefs relative to the research questions concerned with Chapter Five, *Narratives of Resilience and Achievement* that is based on the following research questions:

3. What particular military and academic identities to these students possess and self-perceive?
4. How and to what extent do these identities intersect, collide and coalesce?

To conclude the chapter I critically discuss both the strengths and limitations of this work, addressing the limits by recommending future research.

6.2 Understanding autobiography

To begin this discussion, I examine the role of autobiography in gathering the stories of experience and identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army. The descriptions of these experiences and understandings are the personal expressions of participants shaped by socio-cultural influences and mores, creating a form of cultural product (Bruner, 1995:162).

Significantly in this study, an autobiographical approach exposes the way in which the relentless, complex yet covert presence of social class is threaded within participants' narratives, illustrating two crucially important factors. Firstly, how a socio-historical context demonstrates the way in which participants' past experiences affect the experiences of the present. Notions of class are evident in the experiences and opportunities of participants from an early age – indeed from their early school years – and linger as powerful vestiges when they become adult students in higher education. In this research, autobiography provides a unique opportunity to introduce important and profound experiences relating to the childhood of participants to an academic audience that would otherwise seem out of place and inappropriate in academia (Dews and Law, 1995:5).

Secondly, an autobiographical perspective reveals the minutiae of participants' lives, the instances of inspiration and transformation together also with the everyday seemingly minor occurrences that over time and space chafe, bruise and eventually scar the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army. Investigating these educational biographies reveals the differences that exist between and within the experiences of different student populations and the problematic nature of seemingly immutable social categorisations such as class. What this means is that higher education students are identified by social scientists according to established homogeneous groupings that assume shared socio-cultural backgrounds and interests.

Participants unfold stories of motivating or redemptive moments, often involving teachers or family, that result in powerful learning encounters, presenting an opportunity to question and actively change the way in which they perceive

themselves, demonstrating 'turning points' (Bruner, 2001:27) or 'key educational experiences' (Yair, 2008:93). Whilst these short, sharp and sometimes painful episodes may have happened many years ago they still have profound consequences on participants' self-perception. Such consequences often foster a form of personal transformation, demonstrating how people's stories and self-perceptions are fluid and liable to change. Bruner (1995:170) makes this very point, describing the possibility of people to 'redefine the nature and possibilities of the self'.

Importantly, an autobiographical approach that invites people to informally talk about their lives affords participants the opportunity to talk about what is important to their lives, rather than what I think is important to know. I have aimed to ensure that the narratives and the direction of this research are shaped as much as possible by the participants themselves, students from the British Army.

6.3 Narratives of Sanctuary and Salvation

In this section, I begin by discussing the educational autobiographies of higher education students from the British Army. Emerging from these stories and a key over-arching thread of this thesis is that social class is a major denominator in the way that education is experienced by participants. Injurious encounters in compulsory education lead to autobiographical narratives describing the sanctuary and salvation offered by enlisting with the British Army. As they turn to higher education as adults, interviewees experience a sense of marginalisation shaped by an institutional ethos that is both familiar from their youth yet strange to them as adults.

6.4 British Army personnel: educational autobiographies of social class

I demonstrate how traditionally held understandings of 'class' that emphasise categories of employment relations fail to capture new understandings of what is meant by class in the 21st century and the consequent changes to de-industrialisation. As we have seen in Chapter Four, participants desist naming their experiences as classed yet readily recognise and narrate profound encounters concerned with disadvantage arising out of class. What this demonstrates is that conceptually and theoretically far from being in decline, class continues to actively exist and persist but is no longer a clearly visible presence of social stratification. Instead, as the narratives

of participants expose, class silently prowls in the minutiae of people's quotidian lives, hiding in shadows, ultimately affecting their experiences of education. The covert nature of class I identify in this study is supported by Savage (2000:xii), who notes that 'culturally, class does not appear to be a self-conscious principle of social identity. Structurally, however it appears to be highly pertinent'.

This study demonstrates how social and cultural practices are deeply stitched in to understandings of class and the affective, injurious disadvantages that participants narrate. Scholarship that investigates the emotional impact of educational class inequalities (Steedman, 1986; Charlesworth, 2000; Kuhn, 1995; Reay, 2013) support these findings by drawing attention to the profoundly painful, myriad, lingering ways class is experienced, cognizant with descriptions of the 'hidden injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb, 1993) that comprise lives cloaked in anxiety, shame and discomfort.

The findings show the embodiment of class as a painful encounter shaped by dominant cultural signs and signifiers, exposing how cultural codes of language, ways of talking, dressing and interacting relate to issues concerning education. This point is recently made in comments by former Education Minister, Michael Gove, who suggests that working class students may become more successful in selective higher education institutions if they participate in 'shared cultural experiences' of, for example, attending ballet productions (Graham, 2014) adopting aspirational class pretensions and reneging on a working class familial heritage. In effect, the implication, if not recommendation, is that working class students should 'change' who they are by thinking and acting in a class not, and outside of, their own.

Such a suggestion poignantly illustrates the existence and persistence of socio-cultural inequalities that create barriers across all levels of education, diminishing and thwarting the potential of educational flourishing. The work of Bowl (2003), who examines the educational biographies of under-represented students, supports the findings of this current study by drawing attention to the often problematic and complex nature of educational trajectories for working class students, noting early impediments to academic blossoming that include a lack of parental knowledge and

guidance regarding educational choices. Ultimately, these intertwining strands suture participants in to a fabric of disillusionment with education.

The meanings of class that I expose in this work powerfully demonstrate the need for a fresh conceptualisation of what is meant by 'class' in the 21st century (Savage, 2003) going beyond just scratching the surface by delving deeply in to the very fabric of people's lives and how it is lived, felt and experienced within the field of education.

Participants enlist with the British Army as soon as possible after compulsory schooling. Willis (1993), in his classic early study of the educational experiences of disadvantaged male youths also suggests an urgency to leaving school in favour of factory employment, eschewing educational ideological dogma of opportunity and career choice, and thus contributing to cultural and social reproduction theories. However, contrary to the findings of Willis (1993) whose participants actively reject and demean school authority, interviewees from the British Army powerfully articulate an acute and injurious lack of agency over their compulsory schooling, reflecting silent humility and fortitude against inequitable practices and processes. Participants seek sanctuary and salvation from their wounding experiences by joining, training and becoming serving members of the military.

Ministry of Defence demographic data relating to military recruitment is limited but the findings indicate that a high number of recruits are drawn from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds as claimed by Gee (2007). The socio-cultural process by which the British Army recruit and enrol personnel is under-researched in the social sciences (Rech, 2014), presenting fecund ground to interrogate their classed and cultured nature. Recruitment is pertinent to this discussion as notions of enrolment reflect the complex 'defence – public militarism – force' nexus, highlighting the incongruent and shifting public attitudes that contribute to shaping and developing the uneasy soldierhood that participants express. Broadly, strategies of recruitment are characterised by conflicting ideas of a largely 'militaristic culture' and the requirement to be able to mobilize an effective 'fighting force'.

Recruitment is primarily concerned with the maintenance of an effective institution that harnesses a complicit form of quiet public assurance that, in return, supports and

glorifies the military by acknowledging their resilience and heroism, exalting the injured and ultimately providing 'care' for veterans by robust patronage to military charities. This model of recruitment, with its undercurrent of public protection and safety is becoming increasingly questionable in recent national and international politics, typified by the UK involvement in the recent Iraq war and monolithic American military power. The territorial dispute concerning Russia and Ukraine demonstrates the paradox of what *The Economist* (2014), describes as 'Globocop' – the ability of powerful military states to protect and defend the otherwise defenceless, whilst carrying out global military manoeuvres. As such, the military presents a conundrum to potential recruits - whether to forcefully defend or to serve, and in pursuit of which ends?

The ways in which the British Army enlist personnel also shines a light on the efforts of counter recruitment (CR) activists and protest movements that seek to resist, disrupt and impede policies of militarism and militarisation. Such a perspective illustrates that recruitment is bound and tied to a critical moral standpoint towards military violence and the value of human life, reflecting a distinct public attitude that voices an expression contrary to the 'military culture' in which participants in this study are embedded and in which they look for sanctuary after their injurious encounters in compulsory education.

6.5 British Army personnel: experiences of UK higher education

Higher education students from the British Army bring with them what Reay (2002:404) terms 'the shadow of earlier academic failure', filtering their understandings and interpretations of experiences. Despite narratives of disadvantage, the stories clearly illustrate prevailing levels of agency indicating that interviewees are not entirely constrained by their past history and structural impediments. Students from the British Army return to education as adult learners on the basis of enhancing their career prospects, or for personal development post-service.

The transitional aspects of participants' stories are critical to the arc of biography that they construct as students in higher education. Yet for many of the working class

military participants in this study, the transition is a complex, arduous journey, one that can be regarded as contrary to the 'normal' or inevitable biography of entering the labour market (Keane, 2012). The purposes of university education as circumscribed in the Robbins Report (1963), that suggested the holistic development of students, has undergone considerable change. Contemporary conceptions of higher education emphasise a process that advances the capacity of students to continually refresh their knowledge in order that they may adapt to the relentlessly changing requirements of employment and the economic market (Lozano, Boni, Peris and Hueso, 2012).

The modern age of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000a, 2000b) is undermining traditional assumptions concerning the role of universities and their pursuit and legitimisation of monolithic categories based on knowledge and truth. This is being replaced by an institutional insecurity about what university is *for*, in the 21st century, indicating the need for what Barnett (2000b:420) calls an 'epistemology of uncertainty' capturing the lack of assuredness that higher education institutions now find themselves facing. To defend against this modern day institutional crisis of ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991), I suggest that higher education practitioners need to trace back the fibre of their historic past, shaking off the fetters binding them to certainty, truth and legitimisation by returning to an ethos embracing enlightenment and critical scrutiny (Barnett, 2000b) as well as the holistic development of student fulfilment.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences in higher education lack any form of personal fulfilment or transformation revealing instead transitions as conflict that culminate in experiences of marginalisation. A similar dissonance is noted in studies of military students in the USA, that claim military personnel to higher education require support (Rumann and Hamrick, 2009; Livingston, 2009; Zinger and Cohen, 2010) or are 'at very serious risk' (Wheeler, 2012), evoking the possible complexities that military students may encounter.

It is possible to locate the experiences of participating students from the British Army across a continuum of 'needs' that pathologises and perpetuates student deficiency

models, but this is not a finding of my study. Instead, the findings indicate the sense of marginalisation that participants' experience stems from a lack of validation and acceptance by higher education orthodoxy. Indeed, some interviewees claim that higher education institutional policies and practices reflect discrimination towards students from the British Army. It is not surprising that participants in this study are un-easy figures (Woodward, Winter and Jenkins, 2007) in higher education, as they reflect the complex combination of a classed background and the deeply embedded socio-cultural nature of military life, the vestiges of which remain post discharge (Saslow, 2014). Assimilation post-service is not always straightforward as made clear in *Our Soldiers: Return to Civvy Street* a television documentary broadcast in 2013 exploring the way three military personnel encounter acute practical and emotional adaptations when they leave the Armed Forces. Interviewee Corporal Andy Field illustrates this complexity in the documentary when he returns home to civilian life as a triple amputee, simultaneously hailed as a hero and a disabled father.

Participants express perceptions of being 'different', but what is interesting is that this has more to do with conceptions of isolation from the culture of the academy rather than a sense of 'belonging' to the student body (Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003). I indicate that students from the British Army do not experience higher education as an all-encompassing transformative encounter, embedded in the dominant middle class culture (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Rather, participants are 'day' students (Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005) who robustly align with their academic studies as a daily 9 – 5 occupation, without assimilating into the broader cultural ethos of their institutions.

Interviewees in this study participate in, but are not changed by, their higher education experience, retaining and drawing instead on the influences of their past history. What is striking is the way in which interviewees reject educational orthodoxy whilst simultaneously eschewing ideas of inclusion. Paradoxically, students from the British Army claim that they want to be recognised and validated in higher education whilst reject being thought of as 'different', suggesting that this particular student population have resources that enable them to recognise, withstand and negotiate the conflict that exists at the interface of inclusion and exclusion (Chapman Houlton,

2013). This means that somewhat ambiguously these students are suspended in a form of self-imposed liminality, opting for the security and reassurance (Reay, 2001) that their classed military backgrounds afford, whilst simultaneously awkwardly balancing a quest for academic achievement.

Descriptions of educational disadvantage crystallise the ways in which socio-cultural practices continually weave into the cloth of participants' lives, undermining the contention of Devine and Savage (2000:186) that distinctive collective identities such as the working class have been eroded and that there is 'little evidence that class exists as any kind of collective force'. Such a sharp understanding fails to take into account new collective identities that demonise the working class (Jones, 2011) with collective descriptions such as 'chavs' or 'benefit cheats' evoking the disparity between theoretical accounts and empirical analysis. Narratives in this study robustly and conclusively demonstrate the collective nature of class; what it is to be a member of a particular group of people who possess a working class heritage and how this influences their experiences in similar ways.

Many higher education students may experience forms of jeopardy during their learning, but the peril of higher education is unequally distributed across social class (Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Embarking upon studenthood for working class students is juxtaposed with the particular shame these students experience at possible non-completion of studies. Little work exists that examines the factors compelling under-represented students to remain in higher education and diligently achieve academic accomplishment in an often alien environment, illustrating an institutional privileged interest in pathologising certain students. I suggest that opportunities should be seized to ask questions about the ethos of the educational system that students are enmeshed within, and should include investigations examining what qualities foster and enhance educational flourishing.

A number of British Army students in this study form part of the new entrants to a mass university system. The increasing diversity of students in universities present weighty challenges to a stale pedagogic culture that continues to position students dichotomously as 'traditional' or 'under-represented' and 'mature'. In many ways,

what I reveal in this study of the higher education experiences of British Army students is a worrying reflection of 1960s educational psychology research known as cultural congruence, conflict and discontinuity that advanced the idea that particular groups of students fail because they are culturally deprived, deficient or disadvantaged (Foster et al., 2003). In this respect the socio-cultural background that students from the British Army bring with them to higher education is regarded as a deficit rather than the advantage that socio-cultural learning theories espouse embracing collaborative learning.

There may have been attempts to shift away from a deficit student model but the findings of this study demonstrate stubborn shards remaining, affecting the experiences of British Army students in this study in multiple ways. What is missing from concerns that note the persistence of student deficit models is research that identifies how personal resources are utilised by some students to manage their learning in adverse circumstances.

With a more disparate student population, assumptions need to break away from pathologies of ability and support. Instead educational institutions need to cast an inverted gaze and be sufficiently bold to develop fresh understandings to the approaches and attitudes they currently possess (Haggis and Pouget, 2002). This includes the essential voicing and consideration of alternative ideas, experiences and opinions if higher education institutions are to develop in students some level of response to the increasing uncertainty of life after higher education.

In these modern times of uncertainty and flux, higher education policies and practices appear to be resistant to change. Students now need to be equipped with more than just employment qualifications but also a developed range of resources to assist them in life after higher education. Writing from the perspective of compulsory education yet germane to higher education Claxton, Chambers, Powell, and Lucas (2011) claim that students need to learn how to be tenacious, resourceful, imaginative and logical, self-disciplined, self-aware and inquisitive. Such critical institutional introspection challenges what lies at the heart of higher education orthodoxy, including what is meant by learning, teaching and pedagogical relationships and whether these can be

respectfully cognizant of the myriad world views that an increasingly diverse student population will inevitably possess.

The importance of positive interactive pedagogical relationships is clear from many of the narratives of higher education students from the British Army. A supportive pedagogy and a responsive curriculum valuing the collective resources that under-represented students bring with them are small steps towards a refreshing inward and outward looking institutional ethos that actively celebrates and embraces diversity. This can be achieved by a series of small group seminars providing opportunities for students to share their socio-cultural history. Also critical is an examination of the ways in which learning environments are permeated with specific cultural and communicative norms that covertly reflect a 'culture of power' (Delpit, 1988).

This work exposes how the nature of class shapes the experiences of students from the British Army, and how higher education operationalizes classed practices. My analysis illustrates the incongruence of purported attempts to diversify the student population whilst simultaneously continuing with entrenched everyday socio-cultural practices that hinder and prohibit this very quest.

6.6 Narratives of Resilience and Achievement

6.7 Theorization and interdisciplinarity

To begin this section of the discussion, I draw attention to the vital link that interdisciplinarity has contributed to my theorization. During the course of this work, I considered a range of theories to underpin and describe the key findings. Identifying theoretical signposts has been a major preoccupation in order to demonstrate the vitality and value of both anthropological and educational disciplines. What my theorization demonstrates is how interdisciplinary studies can reconfigure research findings into broader debates within the social sciences. By introducing the concept of resilience to my empirical analysis, I integrate and extend existing anthropological and educational knowledge to develop a new and original perspective to thinking about the experiences and identity understandings of students in UK higher education.

In this thesis, I stretch and imaginatively transpose Scheper-Hughes' (2008) concept of resilience aligned with the everyday experiences endured by children and families in the shantytowns of Brazil, to students from the British Army in UK higher education institutions and, most importantly, to under-represented student populations generally, claiming that these students demonstrate a 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes, 2008:25) in the face of adverse circumstances.

I move on to discuss what military and academic identities students from the British Army possess and self-perceive and how and to what extent these intersect, collide and coalesce. I claim that participants demonstrate how resilience endures and protects students' understandings of identity as they traverse negotiations between soldierhood and studenthood. Remarkably, despite powerful perceptions of retaining a sense of soldierhood and vehemently rejecting the precept of studenthood, participants express qualities of resilience that significantly contribute to academic achievement.

6.8 Soldierhood, studenthood and the carapace of resilience

A key finding and original contribution of this work is the salience of resilience in the identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army. Heavily braided throughout the narratives of participants describing the identity tensions they encounter when becoming students, are illustrations of resilience. These highlight the strength, hardiness and relative immunity (Scheper-Hughes, 2008) of participants to endure and protect themselves when they are in the perilous domain they describe of higher education. Their experiences of everyday implicit and explicit challenges are tempered by drawing on resources of resilience, powerfully reflecting a 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes, 2008:25) that manifests in academic achievement.

Knowing what encourages academic flourishing is of great importance to educators. Indeed, understanding this can make the difference between a spiral of exclusion and the disadvantaged person's capability to reject that descent via returning to education (Chapman Houlst, 2013). Participants in this study are fighters but not just by military occupation; in order to survive and thrive academically, they battle with an education system to which they fleetingly belong. I claim that resilience dwells at the

interface of soldierhood and studenthood, where participants' classed military background meets academic achievement.

Resilience is germane to research concerned with why some students fail to complete their studies, whilst others achieve academic accomplishment despite challenging circumstances. I claim that the models on which higher educational institutions purport to better understand and accommodate students, both pedagogically and institutionally are distinctly out of step with research exploring the way in which resilience can protect and endure. Whilst higher education institutions claim to be interested in understanding how student experiences can be improved, these developments are limited to pathologising students by extending existing adjunct university support programmes (Walker, Gleaves and Grey, 2006). What this means is that under-represented students are denied the opportunity of exploring their potential resilience capabilities and educators are prevented from developing pedagogical practices that promote resilience in their students.

Similarly, resilience is salient to widening participation initiatives in higher education, particularly the resources and experiences that students from under-represented populations bring to their studies and impinge upon learning. I claim this current research exposes how the inclusive model of higher education that seeks to embrace and accommodate student diversity is an allegory. Participants from the British Army narrate powerful and profound encounters of marginalisation at their educational institutions. What is extraordinary is the way in which they reconceptualise their alienation by drawing on enduring and protective resources of resilience to become flourishing students.

Resilience is a personal psychological form of capital, utilised by participants to facilitate the successful completion of their studies. Understanding different forms of personal resources is powerful to explaining why some higher education students choose a particular institution to learn at and the ways in which some under-represented students feel out of place in their higher education institutions. In the main, these studies point to the lack of relevant capitals that under-represented

students possess, thus naturalising and normalising the epistemological privileging of particular middle class knowledge and mores (Clegg, 2011).

Despite a considerable body of research exploring the value of personal resources that students express, under-represented students who demonstrate resilience by academically flourishing against the odds, remain unrecognised in UK higher education institutions. This is despite research that argues resilience can be harnessed and facilitated by the development of relational pedagogical practices based on trusting co-operative learning methodologies that expose students to controlled levels of risk (Walker et al., 2006). Explorations of resilience can extend beyond identifying and harnessing this resource in students to the development and expansion of pedagogic skills, in effect transforming teaching towards excellence (Chapman Hoults, 2013). There is an urgent need for a curriculum that encompasses a form of resilience development. The lack of knowledge regarding resilience indicates that there is an epistemological significance to what is warranted and valued in higher education with the resources that under-represented students possess appearing to be of less interest than other privileged areas of scholarship.

Interestingly, a number of researchers employ the term resilience without any detailed description of what is meant (Crozier, Reay, Clayton et al., 2008; Kasworm, 2008; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). What is exciting concerning these particular studies is that they examine the learning experiences of under-represented students in higher education, suggesting that students from under-represented groups are recognised as possessing qualities of resilience. Consequently, I claim that the findings of my research potentially have a far wider applicability than to just students who have served, or are serving in the British Army. Already identified as a collective student resource, (O'Connor, 1997) resilience can be more generally applied to under-represented students, encompassing those recognised as being in danger of early withdrawal from their studies. By facilitating and developing resilience in students potentially at risk of prematurely exiting their studies, student retention and academic achievement may be enhanced.

In an extended review entitled *Thinking Class, Making Class*, (2005b:141) Reay asks how researchers might rescue the 'working classes from being consigned to a mass fate as the rubbish dump of history, or simply as a cultural resource for the middle classes to asset strip'. In this study examining the experiences and identity understandings of British Army students in higher education, I identify a space towards such a rescue by introducing the concept of resilience as a student resource that manifests as an enduring and defensive carapace for under-represented students in higher education.

6.9 Reconciliation: Identities of class, soldierhood and studenthood

This study demonstrates that participants possess complex, contradictory, fluid military and academic identities, manifesting in expressions of soldierhood and studenthood that intersect, collide and coalesce according to the situational context. These identities are shaped by myriad experiences and influences including gender, age and previous experiences of education as well as participants' socio-economic and military backgrounds.

Theoretically, participants narrate identities reflecting an ontological concept of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986) that embraces the different and potential possibilities of who people can be, rather than a monological, or fixed sense of identity. These mutable understandings of identity reflect participants' 'willingness to divest themselves of their clothing and to wear different clothes' (Chapman Houlst, 2013:46). Indeed, the multi-voiced nature of identities that students from the British Army possess mirror heteroglossia, whereby people are not composed of a solitary or unitary identity but are a multiplicity of possibilities, narrating a 'plurality of consciousness's (Bakhtin, 1984:6).

Despite indicating the multiple and fluid nature of identities, the narratives clearly demonstrate how participants are drawn by centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) towards notions of an inner, single and complete self that manifests in participants' articulation of soldierhood. Shaped by the subjective warrant that lingers long after a predisposition to enlist with the British Army, and the inculcation of what it is to be a soldier during their military career, participants retain a fixed and enduring sense of

soldierhood. This surfaces hierarchically in preference to other identities when participants encounter flux and change, challenging assumptions that individuals possess identities that are increasingly adaptive to social change (Giddens, 1991). For participants in this study an enduring sense of identity is essential as without this continual thread they may otherwise be prone to fragility and vulnerability in higher education.

I also identify performative identities (Goffman, 1990) shaped by emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). This shines light on the multiplicity of identity possibilities that students from the British Army can draw on whilst in higher education, adding to the ways in which participants 'move in and out' of who they wish to be (Crozier, Reay, Clayton and Calliander, 2008:23). Identity performances occur from experiences that situate students from the British Army within orthodox higher education practices that pathologise certain students as requiring support. By retaining and expressing a robust sense of soldierhood the necessity for students from the British Army to adapt and change their identities in order to comply with the unfamiliar and adversarial ethos of higher education is precluded.

What this study alludes to is the seeming impossibility of students from the British Army being able to adjust successfully to higher education. Paradoxically, participants vehemently eschew notions of what it is to be a student, by expressing a preference for soldierhood, yet simultaneously defer to acts of learning that are crucial to academic achievement. Such a contradictory phenomenon is also found in understandings of subjective experience, in that people perceive a different conception of 'experience' to that of academic philosophers and psychologists, attributing 'experience' to physical rather than metaphysical states (Peressini, 2013). In other words, higher education students from the British Army regard identity as a fixed, social category that is quite separate from the physical and cognitive actions they demonstrate as conscientious and flourishing scholars in higher education. This raises the thorny issue of the relationship between the identities that I, as researcher, ascribe to participants and their own sense of who they are. This study raises important questions about the nature of what we mean by identity and who is doing the asking. Paradoxically, the concept is crucial in terms of understanding the higher

education experience of students from the British Army, yet superficial in the sense that according to the situational context, participants express a preference or deference for a particular identity over and above others that they possess. Intriguingly, this finding defies any neat logic of categorical identities. Social labels and categories of identity may have been useful analytical tools for inquiry, but such a taut understanding fails to harness the slippery complexities and subtleties of what is meant by identity in the 21st century.

6.10 Higher education orthodoxy

This research takes place within the context of higher education. It is crucial therefore that I cast a critical gaze over the policies, practices and pedagogical approaches that shape the findings, indicating the ways in which participants' experiences are not just located in stories and talk, but also stitched in to the practices and accounts of higher education. In examining the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army, my research sits at the nexus of three broad areas of higher educational research relating to policy, pedagogy and educational sociology.

In this study, students from the British Army are identified as being dissimilar to many of their peers in higher education, corresponding and overlapping with work examining the experiences of under-represented students in higher education. As I have made clear, a common denominator between this study and others is that social class is a prime indicator of difference. To unpick how social class is operationalized institutionally within higher education I draw attention to the policy regimes that privilege the strategies of the middle classes, creating inequalities between student populations.

Although all categorisations of class have a degree of fuzziness (Bassey, 2001), education policies are primarily aimed at satisfying the concerns and interests of the middle class, with particular policies presenting the middle class with strategic advantages in education (Ball, 2003:25). Policies that purport to offer all students choice and competition in effect disadvantage working class students whilst favouring those from the middle classes who are more able to take strategic advantage of the

educational reform policies and practices presented to them. Institutionally, league tables concerned with university reputation and performance seek to attract students of a certain type and ability, enhancing university ratings and implicitly indicating that these students are more highly valued in the education marketplace than other students (Ball, 2003).

Similarly, performance management policies that focus on targets, benchmarks, curriculum and assessment directly affect the practice of pedagogy (Pol and Staricek, 2011) as well as teaching resources, culminating in a move from 'fat' to 'lean and mean' pedagogy (Blackmore, 1997:92) with reduced tutorials and less student contact. What this results in is an impersonal higher education system (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010) that emphasises student autonomy and independent learning – a sink or swim attitude – as a precept to success that removes students from their socio-cultural contexts. Students who find such an environment unhelpful to academic flourishing are encouraged to seek help from systems of student support services, thus becoming students that 'need support' and therefore 'different' from other students reaffirming the institutional view of the standardized student model. As the student population diversifies then it is crucial that higher education organisations move away from a one dimensional perspective that emphasises the needs of students, locating problems in the individual student (Leese, 2010).

I suggest the approach of higher education needs to change direction, by being introspective and far more mutable taking steps towards an adaptation that meets the needs of the increasingly diverse student population. Such a change necessarily involves a long and critical gaze at the existing culture of higher education. If those in higher education who occupy positions of authority and power set the frameworks and make key decisions that privilege certain groups of students, how can there be an expected move away from such approaches? (Burke, 2012).

A recent inquiry undertaken by the leading universities of the UK, the Russell Group into the higher education under-achievement of working class students makes no reference to the possibility of the ethos of higher education being a decisive factor in under-achievement. Instead, the report claims that the quality of teaching is the

most viable indicator of a thriving and successful education sector, concluding that 'In order to see the benefits of increased numbers of white working class children entering higher education in general, the Government needs to continue to try and raise standards across the school sector' (Russell International Excellence Group, 2013), absolving institutions from any responsibility for student under-achievement. Such a finding is contrary to the meta-analytical review carried out by Rubin (2012) who claims that working class students do less well in their studies and are more likely to withdraw early from their courses compared to their peers because they are less likely to participate in a range of college social and formal activities. In contradistinction to the prestigious Russell Group Report, Rubin (2012) concludes by suggesting that a better understanding is required to explore *why* working class students under-achieve.

The findings of this study raise very important questions. Why is it that this particular student population experiences marginalisation at the institutions in which they choose to learn? What these experiences demonstrate is the unimaginative reforms that pepper higher educational history that promise much but change little. Have the aims of widening participation, designed to increase the diversity of the student population facilitated the higher education experience of students in this study? Participants demonstrate the great paradox of under-represented students generally, encouraged on the one hand to enrol in higher education and yet on the other required to fashion themselves in the image of the traditional higher education student, surrendering in effect, their culturally classed background. What, then, is the purpose of higher education in the 21st century? It seems to this researcher and to these students that the primary focus of contemporary higher education is no longer concerned with personal student development but with dominant neoliberal interpretations of economic-utility, equipping students with the necessary middle class skills for economic productivity and employment, framed within perspectives of markets, choice and accountability.

If this is the case, what has happened to concerns with justice, access, and the holistic personal development of students as presented in the Robbins Report (1963) Where is the development of students that emphasises the social dimensions of education,

including capabilities concerned with contributing to agency, wellbeing and the freedom of students to choose how to live their lives? Such a capability approach (Walker, 2006) is concerned with relationships and the empowerment of individuals to author their own lives. This manifests in individuals being embedded in social networks of care and support that at an institutional level encompassing a holistic culture, supportive teachers and caring learning practices.

The social nature of the teacher-student relationship is a fecund area for introducing the idea of a psychological contract as an approach for teachers in higher education to manage both student expectations and their own within the teaching relationship. Within organisational psychology, a psychological contract is defined as an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of an exchange relationship with another party, based on theories of social exchange (Rousseau, 1995 cited in Clinton, 2009). Such social relationships involve explicit and implicit obligations and expectations of each part and are grounded in notions of reciprocity, obligating individuals to respond positively to favourable treatment by others, promoting trust and fairness. A healthy psychological contract, based on a fair exchange of obligations, mutuality and fulfilment are important for effective management (Clinton, 2009).

Clinton (2009:26) suggests that a psychological contract can be a useful tool for teachers in higher education, particularly with the increasing diversity, and possible expectations of, the student population. Such a contract can be formally developed between teacher and students during a specifically designed classroom exercise to consider a range of potential expected promises and commitments. This may include for example, students committing to thorough preparation before a teaching session, being motivated to take an active part and the teacher committing to provide a more stimulating environment than that of a formal, non-interactive lecture. Clinton (2009) however points out the importance of both parties meeting their obligations by ensuring that the commitments selected are relatively achievable and monitored by teacher and students during the contract duration.

Little research is devoted to examining the codes of conduct that constitute ethical teaching professional behaviour and the complex issues of the teacher-student relationship, crucial to developing a productive classroom climate. Teacher education programmes and teachers professional development need to incorporate a more in-depth examination of these issues, including the boundaries of the teacher-student relationship. This could take the form of teacher-student scenarios and focused observations of veteran teachers in the classroom, serving as a basis for on-going conversation and consultation between teachers regarding situations they regularly encounter (Barrett, Headley, Stovall and Wittie, 2006).

Building on the notion that higher education students should be taking a more active role in improving their education experiences Kay, Dunne, and Hutchinson (2010) describe four ways in which scholars can change, shape and lead their learning. First, the authors suggest students as evaluators, where change is driven through listening to students by way of monitoring devices as surveys or focus groups. Second, students are described as participators, involving students with whole institutional systems, from representatives on councils to cross-institutional working groups, or activities similar to writing codes of practice. Third, students may be co-creators, whereby students are involved in the design of curricula, writing question banks and setting assignments. Finally, the authors suggest students as change agents, actively engaged in all higher education systems, taking leadership roles when possible.

Developing a more collegial learning community in higher education is also explored by Mello (2004) who argues that higher education systems need to acknowledge the changing nature of the student population, becoming more responsive to inclusive pedagogies, access and methods. In a study exploring the struggles and distress experienced by students from the working class training as teachers, Mello (2004), claims a major finding is how a specifically designed on-line learning environment facilitated and enhanced camaraderie for participants, encouraging more class discussions and fostering richly sensitive narratives, because the on-line format provided a sense of anonymity. This is particularly pertinent to this study and the experiences of students from the British Army as my own findings suggest, in Chapter Five, the disjunct between students learning with the Open University and those

attending campus based education. What this suggests is that an on-line learning environment creates a form of invisible filter that provides a sense of protection to students.

Investigations concerned with the sociological processes of being a student in higher education evoke the tensions that differences in social class generate. The negative, frequently disrupted and fragmented educational biographies of students from the British Army reveal the uneasy relationships to learning that working class students generally endure (Reay, 2005). In contrast to their middle class peers, military students from the working class inhabit the dark shadows cast from an educational hinterland, struggling to balance the heritage of their classed lives with the dominant orthodoxy of higher education. Potential transformation associated with achievement is laden with the academic calamity and humiliation they were once subject to in compulsory schooling. It is not surprising then that working class students choose safety and reassurance by combining academic accomplishment with a fiercely fought, deeply personal sense of their socio-economic heritage.

6.11 Study strengths and limitations

The methodological approach I have chosen of narrative autobiography is an important strength of this work as this provides a metaphorical bridge between past and present lives of participants. Importantly, narrative autobiography powerfully illustrates how the subtleties of socio-economics impinge upon the everyday minutiae experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army. A further strength of this methodology is that it enables a rounded and richly representational understanding of how participants experience higher education by exploring social practices and the way that these impact upon their personal lives.

A similar examination of the higher education experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army has not knowingly been previously undertaken in the UK and is an important strength to this work. Consequently, the findings significantly add to knowledge concerning the differences within student populations and how they experience university life.

Whilst the findings concern the experiences of participants in this study from the British Army they also complement and add to work examining the experiences of under-represented students more generally. Hence, the analysis of this work is strengthened by a mirroring of the findings with other studies concerned with the ways that these students experience higher education. Excitingly, this strength extends the potential applicability of my findings to a broader student population.

A final very significant strength of this work lies in its interdisciplinary nature. Whilst I have found it a challenge to ground this study in theories that complement anthropology and education, an interdisciplinary perspective opens a rich seam of theoretical possibilities and paradigms enhancing a deeper examination of the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army.

Although I recognise that this study has limitations, the findings make a significant contribution to existing gaps in the field of knowledge relating to the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students. The most pertinent limitation is that the narratives of participants can only provide a 'snap shot' of a given time, lacking the depth that a longitudinal study can provide. Such a study could reveal if and how the narratives of participants change over time and in particular how developments of their identities, that are shaped across time are expressed.

The participants in this work had achieved, or spoke of being on course to achieve, academic accomplishment. Therefore, a serious limitation concerns the narratives missing from this work, of those British Army students who commence higher education but withdraw prematurely before completion of their studies. It is to these students that educational research must urgently turn, to establish why they leave and what personal resources might be identified, harnessed and developed by educational institutions to facilitate retention.

6.12 Exploring new frontiers

To address the limitations outlined above, I outline a number of recommendations to enhance and extend the scope of this research.

Existing educational research has been of great benefit to this thesis, providing a solid conceptual base, yet it is the case that most researchers are primarily concerned with their own particular area of expertise, reluctant to cast a wider, holistic and critical gaze, bringing together policy, pedagogy and sociology. What is important in future research is to understand how seemingly everyday events, routines and cultural practices are not isolated occurrences but evolve into a dynamic patchwork of concentric circles that shape other developing practices. Researchers need to examine how cultural group dynamics interact with those of the broader community at an institutional level as well as investigating the consequences of those dynamics (Foster, Lewis and Onafowora, 2003).

Despite government attempts to encourage and accommodate an increasing diverse student population, participants in this study experience a profound sense of marginalisation from the ethos of their institutions, resulting in students from the British Army inhabiting the dark shadows of higher education. It is therefore imperative that research continues to critically examine the policies and practices of purported educational reforms to ensure that the privileging of certain student groups is identified and contained.

In order to combat the adversarial circumstances they encounter in higher education, participants in this study achieve academic accomplishment by drawing on protective and enduring qualities of resilience. Qualitative research is urgently needed to expand understandings of how resilience can be harnessed and utilised as a potential critical resource, fostering in students a 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes, 2008). This is particularly salient with regard to the missing narratives from this research as deepening understandings of how to capture and develop resilience may be of vital importance to those students who withdraw or escape from their studies prematurely, never to return.

6.13 Summary

In this chapter, I synthesise the findings, conceptual framework and broader literature concerned with this research, reflecting back to the key threads arising from the narratives as described in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. The purpose of this

discussion is to bring together the individual strands and overlapping threads of this research to present a completed tapestry of the experiences and identity understandings of higher education students from the British Army.

I start by discussing how autobiography has been a crucial approach in teasing out the subtle and nuanced ways in which historical dimensions of socio-economics that occur in the minutiae of lives, filter and impinge upon participants' understandings of experience and identity.

Then I move on to the findings as described in Chapter Four, *Narratives of Sanctuary and Salvation*, to discuss the centrality of social class. I reiterate suggestions for a new theoretical paradigm to encompass how class is lived and felt in the 21st century that captures the narrative descriptions of embodied wounds and hurts. The manner in which participants enlist and the recruitment strategies of the British Army, exposing the contested nature of military enlistment is highlighted.

I discuss participants' experiences of higher education and how these reflect participants' uneasiness with dominant orthodoxy, questioning the prevailing institutional ethos with regard to teaching and learning, particularly in light of the increasing diversity of the student population. In drawing attention to cultural diversity, I suggest that new ways of conceptualising pedagogy need to be explored that embrace the variability of students.

Moving on, I refer to Chapter Five, *Narratives of Resilience and Achievement*, drawing attention to the salience of resilience and the important contribution this under researched concept makes to the experiences of higher education students, particularly to those from under-represented groups who may encounter institutional adverse circumstances. I argue for curriculum reform encompassing co-operative teaching approaches fostering resilience development in students.

Then I discuss the complex, contradictory and shifting nature of identities that students from the British Army possess and express depending on the situational context, linking this to an institutional pathology of students who seek systems of support. I probe the usefulness of identity as an analytical tool in research when

participants are able to choose who they want to be in given contexts, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of identity be explored.

I examine what is intended by higher education by discussing the policies, practices and pedagogical approaches that influence the findings, suggesting that higher education institutions need to cast a more critical introverted gaze at what lies at their heart. The increasingly insecure institutional culture that shapes higher education is out of step with the growing diversity of the student population and needs to adopt mutable approaches to policies, practices and pedagogy that address the prevailing uncertainties of the modern world.

Finally, I assess the strengths and limitations of this work and conclude with a number of recommendations to enhance and extend its present scope.

Chapter 7: The Last Post

I marked the introduction to this thesis with the term *veille*, the military musical start to a new day and I refer to this concluding chapter as *The Last Post*, traditionally understood in the Armed Forces as another musical call, marking the end of the day's activities, played at military funerals to mark the passing of a life. I refer briefly back to the rationale underpinning this research and the study purposes and aims, justifying why I chose a narrative autobiographical approach for data collection. I summarise the key themes arising from this work and how they relate to my conceptual framework and contribute to academic knowledge. Whilst this thesis does not claim to generalise to all students from the British Army, some of the findings and conclusions are likely to reflect the experiences and identity understandings of other military personnel and under-represented groups in higher education.

This thesis began by describing the unique demands and obligations placed upon military personnel in the course of their duties that simultaneously often develop tensions when adapting to civilian life at the end of their careers. Little is known about what happens to military personnel when they exit the Armed Forces and although the majority appear to successfully re-settle in to society, a minority fare less well, encountering issues of social exclusion and marginalisation.

Higher education students from the British Army are not identified as a specific student population, overlapping and merging instead with under-represented students, who often experience educational disadvantage. Consequently, the encounters and experiences of military personnel are missing from academic literature concerned with under-represented students, suggesting hidden patterns of marginalisation that can exist in higher education institutions.

The over-arching aims of this work are to explore the higher education experiences of students from the British Army and to examine the ways in which those experiences are mediated by identity. The research questions relate to participants' educational biographies and how they possess and self-perceive identity conceptions of

soldierhood and studenthood and the way that these intersect, collide and coalesce as students in higher education.

Within the Design and Methodology Chapter, I argue that in order to fully capture the subtle and nuanced shapes and meanings of participants' lives, narrative autobiography is not only a suitable frame, but is a necessary paradigm of inquiry in this context, and as such, is my chosen research approach. As an expression of embodied experience, narrative autobiography exposes the sensitivity of how participants live their lives and socio-cultural contexts that gives shape and meaning. I draw on the transformative paradigm aligned with mixed method research to highlight the socially just philosophy that this study aspires to.

7.1 Main overall themes

A key finding of this thesis illustrates how social class practices exist and persist. Chapter Four introduces empirical evidence from the research. Participants demonstrate what it is to have a working class heritage and how this is experienced in their lives. Interviewees reveal the familial lack of information and support regarding post-compulsory education choices, narrating the ways in which they endure injurious compulsory schooling, enlisting with and seeking sanctuary from the British Army as soon as they possibly can. As students in higher education, students from the British Army experience disadvantage and marginalisation. Participants' educational autobiographies describe how hidden acts of class operate in painful ways that linger, affecting the minutiae of quotidian practices, shaping disadvantage and inflicting cultural wounds.

Chapter Five shows that parallel to the theme of class and a critically important original strand to this work, is the way in which participants demonstrate qualities of resilience that resides at the interface of military and academic identities. Students from the British Army express a range of complex and contradictory identity understandings. These include a singular, coherent sense of military identity developed by the subjective warrant and classed, military habitus, and a military identity that surface hierarchically in existential moments when interviewees encounter uncertainty and flux. When describing the social and cultural dissonance

participants experience in higher education, narratives describe their preference to the identity of soldierhood. The mediating membrane of resilience is punctured when participants select to defer to academic studenthood that fosters academic achievement.

Emerging as a significant theme and underpinning participants' narratives of their identity understandings is the marginalisation they encounter within the context of higher education. The alienation that participants in this study narrate reflects how class disadvantage is operationalized within covert educational policies, practices and pedagogy that privilege other student populations.

In Chapter Six, I present a synthesis of my conceptual framework, broader literature and findings, describing how these relate to the study aims and questions. I discuss the crucial nature of narrative autobiography to this work and argue for an urgent new paradigm for understanding class in the 21st century. I link the issue of military recruitment with that of the ebb and flow of public support for the Armed Forces that contributes to the sense of unease that military personnel experience in higher education. I draw attention to the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis and of the crucial importance this has been to my theorisation of resilience.

Moving on, I highlight the importance and significant, original theoretical contribution this thesis makes by introducing the concept of resilience and extending my findings beyond students from the British Army to under-represented students more generally. I draw attention to the concept's applicability to retention studies and widening participation initiatives describing the strength, hardiness and relative immunity participants express when they are in the perilous domain of higher education. I suggest curriculum development encompassing co-operative learning pedagogies fostering resilience within students.

Then I discuss the complex, contradictory and shifting nature of identities that students from the British Army possess and express depending on the situational context, linking this to an institutional pathology of students who seek systems of support. I probe the usefulness of identity as an analytical tool in research when

participants are able to choose who they want to be in given contexts, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of identity be explored.

I examine what higher education is *for* by discussing the policies, practices and pedagogical approaches that influence the findings, suggesting that higher education institutions need to be more proactive, casting a more critical inverted gaze at socio-cultural practices. I suggest that higher education institutional culture is out of step with the growing diversity of the student population and needs to adopt mutable approaches to policies, practices and pedagogy that address the prevailing uncertainties that surround being a student in higher education.

7.2 Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this thesis contribute to four broad realms of knowledge, beginning with what is known concerning students who have a working class heritage and, more broadly still, about students identified as under-represented in higher education. Second, by introducing the concept of resilience, this work enhances and builds upon studies that seek to understand how everyday acts of hardiness fostering endurance and protection, promote in higher education students a 'talent for life' (Scheper-Hughes, 2008). Third, by providing a critical overview of higher education policies, practices and pedagogy, this work contributes to studies that examine and uncover educational inequalities.

Finally, yet most importantly, this work begins a body of knowledge concerning what is known regarding the experiences and identity understandings of British Army personnel in UK higher education, whose voices are currently missing from the scholarship that is academic literature in this field. Without understanding how students from the British Army strive and thrive, little can be done to facilitate the experiences of those military students who turn to higher education but fall injured by the educational wayside, leaving their studies prematurely, perhaps never to return.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

As this thesis draws to a close, the unheard story, that of me, the researcher who has lived and breathed this work for four years must also prepare for The Last Post. This

hitherto silent story is what I, as researcher and author have learned during the process of this PhD for as Schrader (2004:124) claims, the true power of autobiographical research is not what we learn about others, but what we learn about ourselves.

I have learned how complex and messy it is to explore the experiences of other people and how critical it is to include the social context within which such experiences are embedded. Simultaneously, I have also learned the dichotomy that researchers encounter concerning insider/outsider status, referred to in Chapter Three, is something of an apologue. How can in-depth qualitative research be undertaken by a passive and disinterested researcher who has little or no understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? This research and my analysis are strengthened by the fact that I have shared many of the experiences of participants.

I too have the experience of a working class background, carrying the scars of an injurious compulsory education and have experienced on occasions a deep sense of unease as a postgraduate in higher education. I have experienced what it is to be a member of an under represented student group in higher education, drawing on qualities of enduring and protective resilience to foster my academic flourishing, without which I may not have completed this work. I have been able to understand and relate to the influences that may have impacted upon the experiences and identity understandings of students from the British Army. This realisation has led me to my most salient lesson. This thesis is not wholly concerned with the participants, profound as their stories and experiences are, but it is also partially *my* story - my battle with my past and my own fight for the future.

Appendix A - Ethical Approval



Research Ethics and Data Protection Committee
Department of Anthropology
Science Site, Durham DH1 3LE

Date: 2nd June 2011

Dear Kim,

NOTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Re: Lessons from the home front: how can higher education best serve military veteran students?

I am pleased to confirm that the above research project has been granted ethical permission by action of the Chair of the Anthropology Department Research Ethics and Data Protection Committee. You can now start your research.

Approval is subject to the following general conditions:

1. Ethical approval is specific to this Project.
2. If significant changes to the Project become apparent, please notify the Ethics Committee.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events arise that involve risk to participants or others, please report these to the Committee. The Committee may ask you to write a formal report about the problem, and may suggest amendments to your project.
4. After completion of the project, please submit an 'end of project' report which can be found on the DUO ethics pages.
5. Your application will be considered formally at the next ethics committee meeting and you will be notified in due course.

Best wishes for your research!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Carrithers".

Professor Michael Carrithers (CHAIR)

cc (Supervisor)

Appendix B - Informed Consent



Consent Form

Military personnel in UK higher education

Researcher:

- Kim Webb, University of Durham, Departments of Anthropology and Education

Contact details:

- Email k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk Telephone 0191 334 0259

Supervisors:

- Dr. S. Bell, (Sandra.bell@durham.ac.uk), (Anthropology)
- Dr. C. Walker-Gleaves (Caroline.walker-gleaves@durham.ac.uk), (Education)

Purpose of study:

- To identify and understand key themes in army personnel experiences of higher education.

Participation: I understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary
- I may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason
- I may refuse to answer any of the questions
- I will provide an account of my experiences
- My account will be coded and analysed
- Confidentiality will be strictly respected and anything identifying me personally or any organization or people that I may name, will be removed from the written transcript.
- Following completion of the study all written submissions will be destroyed
- I can have access to the findings of the study by contacting Kim Webb
- I understand the researcher will address any questions or concerns I may have about this study
- I may register any complaint I might have with the supervisor's named above
- All information received will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998

If you have read the above terms and consent to take part in this study please:

☐

1. Insert a tick in this box to indicate your agreement to take part

2. Please provide me with your name & email contact details

Name.....

Contact details.....

Thank you!

Appendix C - Information sheet to participants



INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Military personnel in higher education

This information sheet outlines the details relating to my research. If there is anything you would like to ask me, please email me at k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk or phone 0191-334-0259

What is the research about?

I aim to investigate the experiences of British army personnel studying at UK higher education institutions. Very little is known about this emerging student population and as a result the opportunities and challenges they may encounter remain unidentified by higher education sectors. Potentially, the findings may encourage more students from this background and enable future students who have served in the British army to make the very most of their time in higher education.

Who am I?

My name is Kim Webb and I am currently studying towards a PhD in Anthropology at Durham University, Queen's Campus, Stockton on Tees, North Yorkshire.

What is my role?

My role is that of facilitator and interviewer. To encourage personnel to share their experiences, an online survey and social network site have been created by me specifically for my research at <http://enlist2enrol.ning.com/>. The survey, which should take 20mins to complete, is available independently from me as an attachment for those participants who would prefer to not join the network site. Please request this from me at my email address above. After completion of the survey participants will be asked if they would be willing to take part in an informal interview with me; these may be via Skype, email or face to face.

What is your role?

I would like you to tell me about your experiences and perceptions of studying at a UK higher education institution. I am interested to know what influences may have affected your studying – for example, has your military background helped or hindered you?

Points for consideration

The interviews will be audio-taped and used only for evaluation purposes in this study. Survey responses will also only be used for evaluation purposes. You are free to discontinue with the study at any time. All information will be confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the project write-up unless I am asked otherwise. Data received will be securely kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. A summary of the project will be available to participants upon request.

Please be good enough to sign and return the consent form- thank you!



Desperately seeking - British army personnel who have experience of studying at higher education

A PhD researcher is very keen to find British army personnel who are willing to talk about their experiences of studying at higher education in the UK - regardless of whether these encounters have been good, bad or indifferent. Individuals may have studied some time ago, more recently or studying now.

Very little is known about this emerging student population and it is hoped that the findings will encourage more personnel from a British army background to enter higher education at the end of their military careers and that they will be able to make the very most of their time whilst studying. For more information, please contact

k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk

Thank you!



Appendix E - Example of email sent to higher education institutions

To: All UK universities funded by the Higher Education Funding Executive

Subject Line: Military research in higher education

Dear

I am a second year PhD student at Durham University and my area of interest is exploring the experiences and identity understandings of UK higher education students who have served, or are still serving in the British Armed Forces. Attached please find a copy of the ethical approval granted to my research by Durham University Research Ethics and Protection Committee.

The reason I am writing to you is to ask if it is possible for you to advise your students of my research and for any interested personnel to contact me at k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk so that I may be able to pass on more detailed information to potential participants concerning my study.

Very little is known in the UK concerning the experiences of military personnel in higher education and any assistance you can give may enhance the future encounters of students from the Armed Forces, potentially encouraging more to enrol at the end of their military careers.

With grateful thanks for your time,

*Kim Webb
PhD Candidate,
Anthropology and Education Departments,
Durham University*

Appendix F - Example email to potential participants

To:

Subject Line: Military personnel in higher education

Dear

Thank you for your interest in my PhD research. If you would like to participate further can I ask you please to read the information displayed on the website I have designed specifically and securely for this study, available at www.enlist2enrol.com.

Can I encourage you please to create your own profile page, adding any information or pictures that you would not mind sharing with other participants. I hope that the site will develop into a lively forum where you can share with others your experiences of higher education. Please can you to complete the online survey available at the website. If you indicate on the survey that you are willing to be interviewed I will contact you soon to arrange these details.

I am very grateful to you for your time and support, hopefully the information that I gather will enhance the future higher education experiences of military personnel. If you have any questions regarding this research please feel free to contact me at k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk.

Many thanks,

*Kim Webb
PhD Candidate,
Anthropology and Education
Durham University*

Appendix G (i) - Screenshot of Website

The screenshot displays the ENLIST 2 ENROL website interface. At the top, a dark header contains the site title and navigation links: Sign Up, Sign In, and a search bar. Below the header, a main navigation bar includes links for MAIN, MY PAGE, BLOGS, FORUM, and EVENTS. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- WELCOME!**: A section explaining the site's purpose for collecting data for a PhD research project, aimed at British army personnel with higher education experience. It includes a "Sign Up or Sign In" button and social media links.
- PHOTOS**: A section featuring a photo of a man in a field, with links to "Add Photos" and "View All".
- FORUM**: A section with several posts, including "Back to work" and "Latest news!", each with a "Continue" link and a "View All" link.
- MEMBERS**: A section showing a list of member avatars.
- SUGGESTED LINKS**: A section featuring a link to Durham University.

The bottom of the page shows a status bar with "Internet | Protected Mode: On" and a zoom level of 100%.

Appendix G (ii) - Screenshot of Website


Sign Up | Sign In | Search enlist 2 enrol

ENLIST 2 ENROL

MAIN | MY PAGE | BLOGS | FORUM | EVENTS

A social network site for British army personnel who have experience of studying at higher education in the UK.

PHOTOS



+ Add Photos | View All

FORUM

 Back to work

I've interviewed 20+ people so far but I'm still trying to find participants willing to talk about their experiences of higher education so if you

WELCOME!

What is the purpose of this site?

The site has been created for the collection of data for my PhD research. I hope this free social network will develop into a vibrant forum where British army personnel can record and discuss their higher education experiences. These personal encounters may be good, bad or indifferent and may have occurred some while ago, or, if you are currently a student, right now!

If you have served in the British army and have personal knowledge of studying at higher education - no matter when or for how long - your responses are important to me.

My involvement with enlist 2 enrol will cease on June 30th 2012. It would be great if participants wanted to carry on using and developing the site after this date.

Who am I?

Read my [profile page](#). Complete a profile page yourself - let me know who you are!


How do you participate?

Because of spammers, I have to approve all membership here - so please sign up - this may take a couple of days. There is no cost to yourself, the site is free. Once your membership is processed you can start contributing to the site. Click on [How to Start](#) if you are new to internet forums and feel free to contact me if anything is unclear. You can reply to someone else's comments, have a moan, start a discussion and give your opinion all on this site! Please sign in

Welcome to enlist 2 enrol

[Sign Up](#) or [Sign In](#)

Or sign in with:



PLEASE COMPLETE THE ONLINE SURVEY BY CLICKING ON THE BOOTSI!



378 Visitors
24 Sep 2011 - 23 May 2012



Click to see

know or anyone - please pass on my details to them...

[Continue](#)

Started by Kim Webb May 2.

 Easter Progress

I'm taking a break over the Easter period and heading South to Norfolk for a short holiday. When I get back I'll finish the promotion of the site - I've still got a few universities to contact and...

[Continue](#)

Started by Kim Webb Apr 5.

 Latest news!

I've been off for a couple of weeks with a nasty bug but have now returned to work full of renewed energy! I'm still conducting (and transcribing) interviews and have noticed the use of military...

[Continue](#)

Started by Kim Webb Mar 26.

 Carrying on.....

A little while ago I mentioned that I have started (informally) interviewing people and I expect to do this until the summer now. I'd really like to think of these in terms of conversations...

[Continue](#)

Started by Kim Webb Mar 2.

+ Add a Discussion | View All

regularly because each week I will post something and will be looking forward to your responses.

There is an online survey included in this site - If you have some spare time I hope you will fill it in - the front page of the survey has all the details but if anything isn't clear, please contact me.

If you think this network site may be of interest to someone you know who has served in the British army and studied at higher education, please forward the address to them.

Why should you participate?

Very little is known in the UK about the challenges and opportunities British army personnel encounter at higher education. Your contributions to this site could provide a lively forum for current students will also help future students from the army to make the most of their time whilst studying. The findings will help higher education institutions to identify how best to encourage, support and retain students from the British army and potentially increase these student numbers.

Will your responses be confidential?

Your name, or the name you choose to call yourself, will be displayed on this site, but your email address will not be shown unless you make it known to other participants. When writing up my research, all information shared on enlist 2 enrol will be anonymous and no information will be included that allows you, or your university to be identified in any way.

Are there any risks to taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks to taking part in this study which has been approved by the Research Ethics and Data Protection Committee, Anthropology Department, Durham University. I hope that this network site develops into a lively forum whereby participants motivate, support, and encourage each other.

Will you be able to see a summary of the finished research?

A summary of the finished research will be available upon request.

SUGGESTED LINKS



MEMBERS



View All

What should you do if you have a question or want more information?

Contact me at k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk or see the 'Contact' tab for other useful names and addresses. Feel free to let me know of other contacts you think may be useful.

Appendix H - Survey Details

Survey details

The responses to this survey will form part of my PhD research that aims to collect and record the experiences of British Army personnel at higher education in the UK.

This survey will close on 30th June 2012 and is open to all British Army personnel over the age of 18, who have had some experience of higher education. All data will be anonymous and if this study is published no information will be included that allows you personally to be identified.

If you choose to participate, please complete the survey which should take approximately 20 minutes. This research has been approved by Durham University and there are no foreseeable risks to taking part.

Your participation will raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities British Army personnel encounter in higher education and will enable future students from the British Army to make the most of their time whilst studying. I hope that this research will assist higher education institutions in understanding how best to encourage, support and retain students from a British Army background and potentially increase these student numbers.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this survey or any related matter, please contact me at k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk – thank you for your time – your comments are very valuable to me.

1. Have you read the above information and voluntarily agree to take part in this survey?
2. Tell me all about yourself - your age, gender, educational background, when and why you joined the British Army. Tell me about your army career.
3. Describe your student life. Have you completed your higher education studies or are you studying now? Are you part-time or full time? What degree programme were/are you on and where?
4. Tell me about your experience at higher education. What was good, bad or indifferent?
5. As a student in higher education, did you or have you learned anything new about yourself?
6. Thinking back over your life, has there been an event, person or episode that may have influenced you as a student?
7. Do you think that your army background has affected your student experience in any way? How?
8. What motivated you to study?
9. May I contact you at a later date to arrange an interview? This can be via Skype, over the telephone or face-to-face. If yes, please leave a contact email address.
10. Is there anything you would like to add about being a student with a military background that has not been covered by the above?

Please send this survey back to me at k.v.webb@durham.ac.uk as an attachment – thank you!

Appendix I - Demographic Data

Demographic data of participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Still serving</i>	<i>Years of British Army service</i>	<i>Academic interest</i>	<i>Interview type</i>
<i>Adam</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Project Management Construction</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Ailsa</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Face to face</i>
<i>Alistair</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Forensic Science</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Brandon</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>10+</i>	<i>Leadership & Management</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Charles</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Christopher</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Health & Human Sciences</i>	<i>Face to face</i>
<i>Curtis</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Computer Science</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Advanced Management</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Echan</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Automotive Design</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Hector</i>	<i>>50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Theology</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Jared</i>	<i>>50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>22+</i>	<i>Psychology</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Jay</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Health & Human Sciences</i>	<i>Face to face</i>
<i>Jeremy</i>	<i>18-25</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>Skype</i>
<i>Josie</i>	<i>36-50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Health Studies</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Mylo</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Information Systems with Business</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Ralph</i>	<i>>50</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>World War Studies</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Rex</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Civil Engineering</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
<i>Susan</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Skype</i>
<i>Walter</i>	<i>18-25</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Defence, Development, Diplomacy</i>	<i>Face to face</i>

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